

EZEKIEL'S SIN

J. H. PEARCE



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS.

Chap. PZ3 Copyright No.

Shelf P3145Ez

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

EZEKIEL'S SIN

A CORNISH ROMANCE

BY
J. H. PEARCE

AUTHOR OF "ELI'S DAUGHTER," "INCONSEQUENT LIVES," ETC.

*"Here lies poor old John Hildebrod—
Have mercy on his soul, Lord God!
As he would do, were he Lord God,
And Thou wert poor John Hildebrod."*

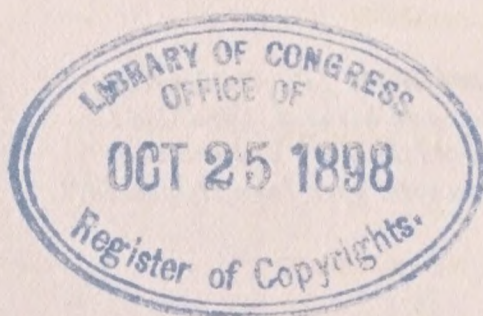
NEW YORK
GEO. H. RICHMOND & SON

1898

PZ3
.P3145
EZ

17213

COPYRIGHT, 1898, BY
GEO. H. RICHMOND & SON



TWO COPIES RECEIVED.

33784

June 1, 1898

2nd COPY,
1893.

7m.v.g. n. 16-18.

Contents

CHAP.	PAGE
I. A TEMPTED MAN	1
II. THE OLD LIFE AND THE NEW	8
III. A TEMPTED HOUSEHOLD	16
IV. SHADOWS	25
V. AT THE EDGE OF FAIRYLAND	34
VI. SECRETS	47
VII. THE CRABBER AND HIS WORLD	54
VIII. A COUNTRY WOOING	62
IX. SUNSHINE AND GOSSAMER	66
X. LOVERS AND A LISTENER	71
XI. PREPARING FOR THE WEDDING	75
XII. SPRING	84
XIII. YESTERDAY AND TO-MORROW	89
XIV. THE DAZZLE OF LOVE	94
XV. THE WIND IN THE TREES	98
XVI. WEDDED BLISS	106
XVII. ANTICIPATIONS AND MEMORIES	111
XVIII. THE HEART OF A GIRL	119
XIX. ILLUSION AND DISILLUSION	121
XX. A LONELY MAN	128
XXI. SIDELIGHTS	134

* CHAP.	PAGE
XXII. THE CRABBER AND HIS SON-IN-LAW . . .	142
XXIII. IN THE ENCHANTED WOOD OF MEMORY . . .	145
XXIV. DAUGHTER <i>versus</i> WIFE	151
XXV. A MEETING ON THE MOOR	158
XXVI. A MAN AND HIS BURDENS	167
XXVII. EXHAUSTED AFFINITIES	173
XXVIII. A MIDNIGHT CONFERENCE	178
XXIX. THE IRONY OF A SACRAMENT	182
XXX. A TROUBLED WATCH	189
XXXI. TIDINGS	197
XXXII. PUT TO THE TORTURE	204
XXXIII. CONFIDENCES	213
XXXIV. TWO WOMEN AND A MAN	224
XXXV. AT THE END OF THE DAY	236
XXXVI. AN ELECTRIC ATMOSPHERE	242
XXXVII. THE DEFEAT OF THE OLD	246
XXXVIII. A CONSCIENCE AND ITS KEEPER	250
XXXIX. THE TRIUMPH OF THE YOUNG	255
XL. HOPES AND REALISATIONS	260
XLI. THE RETURN OF THE SWALLOWS	264
XLII. WATCHING AND WAITING	266
XLIII. STORM	270
XLIV. THE TWILIGHT OF THE GODS	282
XLV. THE HILLS OF REST	293

Ezekiel's Sin

CHAPTER I

A TEMPTED MAN

THE tide had just begun to ebb that morning when Ezekiel Trevaskis set off for his crab-pots, taking with him his provisions for the remainder of the day—a jar of water, a potato-pasty, and a hunk of saffron cake. When the ebb was at its lowest, and the tide was practically dead, he was already far out on the distant fishing-grounds, with a fair stock of bait—gurnards, bream, and a few pollack—gathered in the brine-soaked bottom of his boat.

Since then, he had emptied and re-baited his various strings of pots—which were scattered along the coast from Treen Dinas to the Bucks—had conveyed his catch from these to his larger store-pot near Polurrian, and had again sailed out almost to the solitary lighthouse on the Wolf; meaning to end up the day by whiffing for mackerel, which just then were fairly plentiful round the coast.

The flow, however, had commenced while he was tacking off the Longships—the most dangerous reef in the Land's End race—and in a little while the vast tidal movement of the Atlantic had begun to make its effect felt from Scilly to Mount's Bay.

With the flowing tide the wind freshened slightly, and the seagulls seemed to grow busier and more alert as the slow rise and brimming of the water affected their various haunts and resting-places, submerging reefs and beaches, climbing

slowly up the cliff-ledges, and generally passing, like a wave of change and unrest, over the main portion of their world.

Innumerable things the tide swept in with it: shoals of mackerel, with the shark-like dog-fishes in their wake; weed-tangles; drifts of wreck-wood from the open ocean; the corks of a fishing-net cut adrift by a passing steamer; huge floating jelly-fish; a dead body here and there: perhaps, also, the secret weapon destined to wound to his undoing some lonely toiler drifting on the seas, one whose grey life hitherto had been beyond reproach, but whom to-night Fate meant to put grimly to the test.

Feeling the pulse of the tide now beating against him, Ezekiel instead of running towards the Wolf—whose lonely grey pillar was still a few miles distant from him—decided to turn back into the bay and follow the flow, whiffing as he went. He had practically enough bait for the next setting of his pots, having caught several large pollack between Pordenack and the Longships, and he decided that the mackerel which he might now catch, if any, he would take home for his supper, and for dinner on the morrow.

A tall, lean man, six foot in his stockings, with a bony face and a big, beaked nose, and with a thick, heavy beard as grey as a badger, Ezekiel had a markedly individual appearance: and sitting here in his boat, on the blue field of the Atlantic, he had the air of being thoroughly at one with his surroundings. The lower part of his face was painfully lean and sharp, the upper half, by contrast, seeming unnaturally developed, and his eyes were of a faint, dreamy blue, while in his ungainly ears he wore thin gold rings. His clothes, however, were less individual than his face. He wore a brine-stiffened, brown-stained duck "jumper"; woollen trousers, once of a dark blue, but whose present hue was a rusty indigo which was complicated by countless smears of tar; a stout sou'wester, that had once been yellow; and a pair of well-oiled, long sea-boots. His little boat looked also rusty and weather-beaten, as if the sea had gnawed at its planks and soaked them with her brine, and the grey rain had lashed it, and the wind had buffeted it

pitilessly, much as the storms of life had buffeted its occupant. The boat was patched (though that carefully) in a dozen different places, its ropes and sailing-gear were old and worn, it was markedly in want of a coat of paint, and it was as ill-furnished as it could be with reasonable regard to safety. Altogether it was very evident that, up to the present, Ezekiel had not made a success of his life. Whether or no it was now too late for him to do so, was a question that could be argued on, but could not be answered yet.

About a week previously, a large steamer—homeward-bound from Australia, and carrying a score, or more, wealthy passengers—had been wrecked on one of the reefs off Scilly, and within the last few days three or four of the dead bodies had drifted into Mount's Bay, borne almost abreast of Mouse-hole by the inflowing tide. These had been taken to Penzance by the fishermen who had fallen in with them, and there reported to the Custom House and handed over to the Receiver of Wreck: and one of the salvors who had earned a few shillings in this way was Ezekiel's neighbour, Isaac Roscorla, such another lean old crabber as himself.

As Ezekiel attended to his lines this afternoon, he was thinking more of Isaac Roscorla's good fortune than of the silver-glistening mackerel he occasionally hauled in. Life was so persistently niggardly in its gifts to him that a few shillings added to the week's income was something to make Ezekiel's mouth water merely to think of: and as he let his imagination dally with the idea, there crept into his eyes a look not unlike hunger; a look of restless, furtive dissatisfaction, with a dash in it of almost stealthy desire.

The quiet loneliness of the sea was in itself a temptation: a temptation to brood over the immense duplicity of life—its cheating promises, its paltry performances; the trials and disappointments that had to be endured, and the pleasures that were always persistently out of reach. For the massy singleness and simplicity of the ocean—the absence of the confusing and multitudinous details which a land-scene often forces on the thoughts—has something of the cloisteral effect of a retreat; and even an uneducated crabber, drifting lonely

across the waters, occasionally finds himself succumbing to the spell. And Ezekiel, brooding sullenly over matters this afternoon, fell presently into such a moody bitterness of soul that, if he could have coined his life-blood into sovereigns, he would there and then have attempted the task.

Not that he was thus greedy of money for himself. As far as he was personally concerned, he was reasonably content with his starved existence; not having imagination enough to desire anything better, or, at least, better on lines at once ampler and less grey. He had been a crabber all his life—with intervals of employment on the larger fishing-boats when the crabbing season closed and the pilchard fishing began—and under his father's supervision he had learned how to bait a pot and how to disarm the crabs and lobsters taken from it, long before the down had begun to appear upon his face. Polurrian cove, with its half score cottages, had really been the world for him, as far as shore-life was concerned. When he was eight and twenty he had married Malva Polgrain, the daughter of an elderly crabber in the cove, and with this, and the birth of his five children by her, his experiences of life had practically been rounded off: the milestones along *this* route, and his adventures between them, summing up, so far, his knowledge of the world.

No, he was not greedy of money for himself. Neither did he hungrily desire it for his wife. Like himself, Malva had been tamed and subdued by life, and, if she ever had been rebellious, she had long forgotten the mood. It was solely for his children that Ezekiel's hunger was excited. Or, at least, for them in the first place and most directly: though certainly in the second place (so alloyed are human motives) it was to feed his jealous pride in them and his pleasure in their happiness.

Of the five children born to him, only two were still alive. One, the first-born, had died in infancy. The third and fourth had been sons: and on these he had built his hopes. But the sea had lusted after them, and had strangled them in her hunger; and now one of them was sleeping quietly under the grass in Choone churchyard, and the other lay . . .

God alone knew where! God, and the old sea-mother, perhaps? The second and fifth children were, however, still alive: and both (so Fate had willed it) were girls. Drusilla, the eldest, remained at home to assist her mother; though already, at six and twenty, she was hungering for wider experiences and was noticeably beginning to be restless in the nest: while Morvenna,¹ the youngest, a girl of seventeen, was half a monitor and half a school-teacher in the little granite school-house up in the valley, midway between Polurrian and Choone.

It was for Morvenna and Drusilla (perhaps chiefly for Morvenna) that Ezekiel hungered after what seemed to be for him the unattainable: not wealth, in the vague and grander meaning of the term, but a sufficiency of ready cash to make a shilling of no importance, and half a sovereign . . . well, a sum that could be spared cheerfully.

The twelfth of May (now a fortnight distant) was 'feasten Sunday,' the 'great day' of the parish: and at feastentide all the girls and youngsters, if possible, indulged in new clothes, or in new finery of some kind—even if it were only a necktie, or a new ribbon in a hat. Morvenna and Drusilla wanted to appear in new dresses, or, at the very least, in new spring hats: but, up to the present, Ezekiel, with the heartiest desire to humour them, had found himself unable to make a promise to that effect.

Only this morning Morvenna had come pleading to him, coaxingly, to advance her half the amount of her quarter's salary: which she would be able to repay him at midsummer, as he was aware. But Ezekiel had been obliged to tell her, most reluctantly, that it was as impossible for him to advance her the desired twelve-and-sixpence as it was for Carn Bargis (one of the headlands of the cove) to lean across and shake hands with its opposite neighbour Carn Mellyn. Morvenna had borne the refusal with reasonable self-control, but he could see, from her trembling lips, that she was deeply disappointed, and remembering how much a bit of finery meant

¹ Morvenna = the sea-maiden.

to a girl of her age, Ezekiel understood and sympathised with her disappointment. He felt that he would willingly have given a finger to have been able to meet her wishes and to have sent her off happy with a kiss and a 'yes!'

This request of hers was still playing on his mind as he sailed along past the grey front of Treen Dinas, with the great bell, swinging above the sinister Runnelstone,¹ steadily tolling, tolling in his ears as the Atlantic surges swayed it to and fro. A few powerful herring-gulls occasionally winged their way past him, the light-skimming terns were wheeling about by scores, and now and then he saw the black head of a cormorant lifted above the water with a sudden alertness, accompanied by a momentary gleam of silver as the strong beak raised some writhing mackerel which an instant after vanished in the bird's capacious maw. The boom of the sea against the granite coast-line, the lap and gurgle of the water around his boat, and the long, soft sighing of the wind across the waves, there were no other sounds to attract his attention, unless it were the shrill brief cry of a gull; and Ezekiel, peering now into the glassy depths beneath him, and now gazing across the water to the distant cliffs and beaches, became gradually depressed into a mood so sombre that, if he had hauled up Satan at the end of one of his hooks, he would have been tempted to sell his soul to Him for the satisfaction of his desires.

Presently, as he idly watched his lines, he noticed an exceptional strain upon them—as if something unusually heavy were tugging at the hooks.

A sudden heat of excitement flickering through his veins, he immediately set about hauling in the lines: and then became aware—with a throb of superstitious terror—that a long dark object was approaching the boat, as if held by the hooks, or else clinging to them.

The answer to his secret craving for temptation had come to him in the guise in which he was best able to welcome it.

¹ The Runnelstone is a huge mass of granite, partly submerged, thrust up through the open sea about a mile from the shore. A large bell-buoy is moored in its vicinity.

To welcome it, that is, supposing he should feel inclined . . . alone as he was (and he glanced over his shoulders with the nervous swiftness of fear) . . . to treat it as a temptation, and not as anything worse.

He knew well the loneliness and hostility of the sea, the menaces of her savage lust, her secret grudges and her inhospitableness, and the thought of these shook him with a deep disquiet, as he glanced down now at the prey which she had seized, and tried to steel his trembling nerves to defy her—to defy her *not* for his fellow-men, but singly, and for himself.

For a minute or two, Ezekiel, with his eyes glittering strangely, peered over the edge of the boat into the water. As he did so, under the bronze of its wind-and-sun tan, his bearded face seemed to grow almost wan, as if with a strange, half-terrified sadness. And meanwhile there drew near to it, at the end of the lines, another pallid face, a face bearded like his own, but with eyes that stared persistently and yet were as blank as stones.

Ezekiel, in return, stared down at the floating body: stared at it hard, and long, and wistfully. And as he stared at it, he perceived that a couple of hooks had caught the drowned man by the heavy belt around his waist.

But the fastenings of the belt had broken, and it was gradually becoming detached, owing partly to the weight of the body and partly to the movement of the boat.

In a minute or two, unless he seized it from the boat, the body would slip from the belt and float away.

Would the hooks hold the belt, or would that slip and sink?

He bent over the boat eagerly, his eyes shining with excitement, and began very slowly to draw in the lines.

He was aware that, by doing so, he might possibly save the belt . . . but what of the body? . . . It was slipping even as he touched the lines.

. . . In his tragical isolation, Fate was tempting him to his undoing: holding out to him its hand of gold with an air of friendly secrecy. And Ezekiel, thinking of Morvenna (and of her almost solely), seemed to forget the hand of iron which was clenched behind its back.

CHAPTER II

THE OLD LIFE AND THE NEW

ALREADY in the depths of Polurrian cove¹ the westering sun was hidden from sight, though any one ascending the glen to the ridge of downs out of which it was carved would have seen the sun still glaring across the granite hill-tops that formed the backbone and main watershed of the peninsula. The sullen moan of the incoming tide was still audible all along the coast, and across the skerries and ledges, the reefs and haggard rocks, the long green rollers made a jabble of broken water which from the bleak sea-front looked threatening enough.

A solitary raven was sailing high above the clifftops, uttering at intervals its hoarse, barbaric *cawk!* in which the very spirit of its loneliness seemed to be concentrated; a few kittiwakes and terns were fishing between the headlands, and across the gorse-cushioned flank of Carn Mellyn, a kestrel wheeled and hovered restlessly. Lower down the sedge-warblers chattered among the flags, and a score or more black-backed, twittering swallows skimmed rapidly to and fro across the rush-fringed shallows where the streamlet bubbled tinklingly as it travelled to the sea.

On a shelf-like terrace, or outcrop of rock, not three hundred yards from the boulders of the beach, stood a row of weather-beaten granite cottages, the thatched roofs half as tall again as the walls, and the small, coarsely glazed windows—two to each cottage-front—leaving the impression that they were altogether too insignificant to light up the interiors to any appreciable extent, so that one imagined the latter as always weighted with shadow, and having the atmosphere of a cavern or a tomb.

In spite of the gulls and the wheeling swallows, a de-

¹ Polurrian = the home of the sea-birds.

pressing air of mournfulness seemed to pervade the cove. Through the thin and hungry soil the rock thrust nakedly, the slopes were strewn with enormous blocks of granite, and except in the sheltered head of the valley and along the banks of the bubbling streamlet, the vegetation was of the scantiest, and showed but little variety; gorse, broom, heather, and grass being monotonously repeated in every direction. The effect produced by the scattered boulders, and by the wild and unsheltered aspect of the glen, was heightened by the hollow moan of the breakers and the restless, dreary sighing of the wind: heightened also by the huge mural headlands whose fronts were already being drenched with spray, and whose sinister rock-masses, so enormous in their bulk, made the tiny granite cottages, clustered together on the sea-front, look forlorn and almost pitiful in their insignificance.

All the chimneys of the little row were now beginning to smoke busily, and through the half-open windows and widely open doorways the crackling and the pungent aroma of burning furze stole out pleasantly on the evening air.

The work of the day for the women was almost ended, and that the labours of the men-folk were also drawing to a close was evident from the domestic preparations in the cottages, and from the occasional presence of a clean-aproned wife looking out from the doorway for the advent of her man.

In the row, when the return of the men was expected, the women's eyes invariably sought the sea: for here, in Polurrian, the sea was the great protagonist: every one had to wrestle with it, if they wished to live at all, and along its highway every one came and went—*went*, now and then, unhappily, to return again no more.

Even the healthy faces of the women at the doors did little to dispel the pervading sombreness. The homes at their backs were so poor and rude, and the women were so evidently the serfs of their surroundings—held in thrall for life to the loud-clamouring sea, and the lean and hungry hills about them—that the idea of a monotonous gloom in

their lives forced itself on the thoughts at every juncture the crumbling lines of breakers — toppling over, rising toppling over again incessantly—seemed the type of these lives, so isolated and so elemental, so apparently fruitless in their efforts, and so unrememberable in their effect.

One after another, the half-dozen crabbers who dwelt in the cottages came creeping round the headlands from their crab-pots and fishing-grounds, and, anchoring their boats, came leisurely ashore.

By the time the twilight had begun stealthily to obscure the scene, all the men were indoors except Ezekiel Trevaskis, whose boat even now was not in sight.

Again and again Malva went to the door, arching her hand above her spectacles to peer across the cove, but she saw only the anchored boats of her neighbours, the grey tumbling waters, and the steadily darkening sky.

“Let’s start tea without waitin’ for’n, mother,” said Drusilla, at last becoming impatient at the delay. “I’m as dry as a chirk,¹ and as hungry as a hunter.”

“No, no; let’s wait: I’m in no hurry,” remarked Morvenna: “you know father doesn’t like to have his tea alone.”

“Take thy tay, ef thee want it,” said Malva to Drusilla. “Thee’rt like lazy Lurk—two stomachs to ayte an’ none to work.” And with that she went to the door again.

In the shadows at the back of the cottages the bats were already abroad, and occasionally one flew squeaking past her, while the low, murmurous rustling of the flags, blended with the roughened utterance of the streamlet, travelled faintly and confusedly to her ears at intervals as the wandering night-wind drifted through the glen. Louder than all was the clamour of the sea between the headlands, the pounding thud and hammering of the breakers, and their long, retreating growl as they clashed the boulders together, and rattled the drift of shingle that lay beween, and under these.

The great loneliness and desolation of twilight was on

¹ Cinder.

the cove—a loneliness whose note of pathos is even deeper than that of the night—and on the heart of the crabber's wife there brooded heavily and drearily the sombre racial thoughts of the peasant, filling her with a deep, though inarticulate sadness. The toilers of the sea are at the mercy of every shifting change, and their wives are an anxious race, whatever their sweethearts may chance to be.

"Thy man not come in yet?" shouted a neighbour, who could hear Malva's restless movements on the granite doorstep, the doors of all the cottages being open.

"No, you; bra' an' late to-night, esn'a? I ben 'spectin' un in for the laast hour. Ded Isaac see un, as he was comin' up to cove, do'ee knaw?"

Mrs. Roscorla shouted in the question to her husband, who accordingly came to the door to reply.

"Iss, you; seed un just afore sundown. He was a bra' way out: haaf way across the bay. He was whiffin' for mackerl, b'leeve, when I seed un."

"Well, s'pose he waan't be much longer," said Malva.

"'Spect not. Anyhow, he's right 'nuff," said Isaac. "Got in among a good school¹ of 'em, I 'spect. Thee'll ha' mackerl enough to-night to last'ee for a week. Unless, you," added Isaac ruminantly, "unless he've falled in weth a body from the *Gannet*, an' ben an' took un in to Penzaance this tide."

"No such luck for my man," answered Malva. "He's more likely to lose than to find, es 'Zekiel."

"Well, we never knaw wha's in the pot² 'till we empty it. Hopin' waa'nt hurt nowan," said Isaac. And with that he went indoors to his tea.

By this time, the blurred grey waste of waters, with its headlands and its stretch of starless sky, was chiefly distinguishable from the massed shadows of the valley through the white line of foam, where the breakers met the beach. But Morvenna, whose keen young eyes were questing to and

¹ Shoal.

² Here meaning the crab-pot.

from intently, presently cried out exultantly to her mother, "There he is! Just coming round Carn Bargis!"

Malva studied the blurred scene from under the shadow of her hand.

"Iss, there he es," she replied contentedly. "He's late, but he'll soon be in to moorings now." And she went indoors to complete her preparations.

Meanwhile Morvenna ran lightly down the bank of shingle, and, standing at the frothing edge of the waves, waited there for her father, humming softly to herself.

Owing to the headlands projecting on either hand, the chief anchorage of the boats (under the lee of Carn Bargis) was so veiled in shadows that it was impossible to distinguish anything in the cave-like blackness, and from the shore the boats there were now entirely invisible. But Ezekiel knew the sea-bottom of the cove—its ledges and shallows, its rocks and its patches of sand—with a more minute thoroughness than he knew the floor of his own kitchen, and he accordingly brought his boat to her accustomed moorings as easily as if it were broad day.

To Morvenna, standing at the edge of the waves, her father had become invisible, a mere portion of the blackness, as soon as he had rounded the headland and crept in to his anchorage. Knowing well, however, where he would be likely to moor, she presently launched her voice at him through the shadows.

"Father! I'm here waiting for you!" she called to him across the water: the sounds ringing out as purely as the notes of a treble bell.

Ezekiel, out at the mooring-grounds, could just catch the cry; but, owing to the trampling waves, he was unable to distinguish the words. He recognised the voice as being that of his youngest daughter, and in the mere recognition of it—so many memories did it set vibrating—he realised, with a strange, sudden poignancy of emotion, the gulf between the man who had sailed out of the cove in the morning, and the man who came creeping back into it now.

He longed to see Morvenna; yet felt half ashamed to face

her. "Run home an' tell mawther I'm comin'!" he shouted back to her.

"I'll wait for you!" called out Morvenna; catching nothing of his message except the familiar word, "*comin'*!" And tossing back her short brown curls from her forehead, she stood staring across the dusky stretch of sea towards the just-distinguishable line of the horizon.

As she stood there staring, a faint silvery glimmer began to show above the sea-line, and the huge earth, slowly revolving on its axis, presently revealed to her the wan-faced moon shining steadily in the far-off depths of space.

The riband of shimmering light, unrolling slowly across the sea, finally reached the frothing edge of the waves, making the wet pebbles glisten like lumps of silver and the lips of the waves flush suddenly with life.

A minute or two afterwards, she heard the plash of oars, and Ezekiel, in his tiny punt, became visible in the moonlight: the boat and its occupant (indivisible from the shore) bobbing up and down on the water like a sea-duck.

As he stepped out of the little punt and began to haul her up the beach, Morvenna ran up to him, chattering briskly, and, putting her hands on the gunwale, began to haul at the boat with him.

But Ezekiel, ordinarily so placid and deliberate, was now confusedly restless and agitated. He had the air of one surprised, and trying awkwardly to conceal something: as though a crime, or the clue to it, lay hidden in the punt.

Pushing Morvenna's hand away, he bade her hurry off home: he would follow her in a minute or two, as soon as the boat was up on the bank. And as Morvenna stood back in undisguised astonishment—his roughness, and the constraint of his tones, equally surprising her—he stooped down and began to lift out a crab-pot from the boat.

The strange, sombre glow of hidden superstition that lighted up the secret recesses of Ezekiel's nature, Morvenna was dimly aware of, and had more than once been startled by: but his attitude towards the sea—his furtive, though hidden, terror of her—Morvenna had no more clear compre-

hension of, than a barn-door fowl has of the impulses of an albatross.

Ezekiel's painful anxiety lest she should meddle with the thing he knew of, and should thus come under the menace that he conceived of as overshadowing him, was something that lay quite outside her imaginings. Even had she known all that had happened to him during the day, this phase of his thoughts would never have occurred to her. Seeing no other reason for his unusual conduct—his thrusting her aside so surlily, and his wish to get rid of her—Morvenna put it down as due to a touch of temper. The long day's work had made him cross, she decided: and the slight to her (if a slight it were indeed meant to be) was practically forgiven as soon as it was offered.

"Let *me* carry it home for you, shall I, father?" Morvenna asked affectionately, as he lifted the crab-pot.

"No: I'll carry it meself," said Ezekiel roughly.

Merely to procure this young life pleasure, Ezekiel had risked, perhaps had forfeited, his life-happiness. The knowledge, which was as a cancer eating secretly into his life, created in him a mood of unusual sombreness. And at the same time the flinching sensitiveness that he ached with, as he began to realise the significance of his act, made him tremble lest, unwittingly, he should give a clue to his disquiet. In order to prevent such a stroke of misfortune, he took refuge in a taciturnity that presumably could reveal nothing; and slouched heavily up the shingle without opening his lips again: Morvenna following him in silence with her eyes dimming mistily.

Through the harsh, pounding clamour of the great foam-dabbled waves that hammered noisily and slavered thickly across the ridge of shingle, there was audible, at intervals, a long, plaining intonation, a sound whose melancholy cadence made the heart ache uncomfortably. It was the ceaseless gusty sighing of the wind that was drifting across the cove from the open Atlantic, whose vast plain extended almost limitlessly beyond the peninsula. But the briny smell of the sea, of the great wet tangles and coils of weed and of the

thin spattering of spray which the gusts scattered widely, filled the air with a delicious freshness that in itself was an anodyne. And Morvenna, merely following at her father's heels, and drawing the briny air into her lungs, began insensibly to feel her thoughts freshen in response and the wordless burden of unhappiness slide from her heart.

As far as their fears and wishes were concerned, Morvenna and her father lived in worlds as remote from each other as if they were dwellers the one on the earth and the other on the planet Mars. While they were actually talking together (or while the echoes of the spoken words lingered in their minds) their thoughts, perhaps, came reasonably close. But, given a brief space of time, or a slight push of circumstance, and their minds were as far asunder as the poles. And as Morvenna followed now at her father's heels, with the wind in her hair and the salt spray upon her lips, and around her the but-half-veiled wonderland of night, her mind dropped the burden of Ezekiel's crusty mood with a carelessness which would have caused him a cruel pang had he realised it, and at once set off on a quest of its own.

Presently they came where the light streaming through the doorway picturesquely lighted up their forms and faces, and Ezekiel stopped for an instant to glance stealthily over his shoulder; though rather, it would seem, to peer exploringly into the darkness than to seek his daughter's eyes for a glance of recognition. For as Morvenna watched him wistfully, prepared to greet him with a smile, she suddenly caught the strange expression of his face—the wild stare of the eyes and the latent fear in every feature—and her lips, which were parted to smile at him, remained open in sheer surprise.

But Ezekiel, withdrawing his face as stealthily as he had turned it, again drooped his head and slouched heavily up to the door.

CHAPTER III

A TEMPTED HOUSEHOLD

"WHAT'EE got there, faather?" asked Malva, as Ezekiel entered the cottage. "Thee'rt late to-night: tay ben waitin' more'n a 'nour."

"Onnly an owld pot that wants mendin'," said Ezekiel. And putting it in a corner, at the back of his chair, he took a pannikin of water and went out to wash his hands, the broad granite window-sill serving as a bench.

"Father's tired-out, he'll want to be let alone to-night," remarked Morvenna, as she hung up her hat behind the door.

"What did he lug home that owld pot for, then? We don't want it messing about here, after we've cleared up." And Drusilla, half in petulance and half out of spitefulness, gave the crab-pot a vigorous kick that toppled it over and rolled it for a yard or two across the floor.

"Eh? wha's that? Sounds like money!" cried Malva; as the tinkle of coins, rolling and falling on the floor, suddenly became audible in the little kitchen.

"Money? why, it's suvrins!" Drusilla called out excitedly, catching the glitter of gold on the lime-ash floor.

"Suvrins!" And Malva snatched up the candle and stooped to peer anxiously among the shadows of the kitchen.

Drusilla was already on her knees searching eagerly.

"Here's wan!—Here's two!—Why, there's a handful!" she cried excitedly.

As Drusilla lifted her hand and showed a couple of the coins, Malva turned towards the door and called out in a troubled whisper, "Faather! faather! come here, wust 'a!"

But Morvenna, with the intuition that there was something wrong, had already hurried out to the door to her father.

"Come in, quick!" she called to him, in an agitated whisper.

Ezekiel needed no second summons. For half a minute he stared at her with his mouth falling open: and then, with the lather still white on his arms, he hurried into the cottage as if Fate were at his heels.

Confronted by the light and the scene in the interior, he suddenly stopped short beside the big kitchen-table, on which his supper now stood waiting for him. Clutching at the table tightly with his great wet hand, his eyes sought his wife and stared questioningly at her face.

"Shut the door! pull down the blind!" cried Malva falteringly.

Drusilla, still on her knees on the floor with some half-dozen gold pieces clutched in her hand, stared up at her father and then glanced hastily at her mother, who was holding the candle in one trembling hand while with the other she tried to darken the light falling on the window-panes.

But Morvenna darted forward and rapidly closed the door, and then, as Malva made a restless movement towards the window, Morvenna jumped on a chair and drew down the blind also.

As Drusilla had lifted her face, with her fingers crooked greedily over the sovereigns, Ezekiel had irresolutely made a step towards her; but he immediately checked himself, compressing his lips tightly.

Wiping his wet arms on the knees of his trousers, he now seated himself on a chair, like one heavy with excessive weariness, and, thrusting his hands deep into the pockets of his trousers, he gloomily watched Drusilla, still eager at her task.

"Here's any amount o' suvrins, father, rolled out o' the lump o' net in this owld crab-pot!" remarked Drusilla in a loud, crafty whisper. And lifting one of her dusty hands she disclosed its contents to him.

"I knaw," said Ezekiel gloomily.

Malva scrutinised his features closely. "How ded'ee come by them, faather?" she asked anxiously.

"How many do'ee make them?" quoth Ezekiel to Drusilla.

Drusilla raised herself slowly from her knees and squatted cross-legged on the sanded floor. Then, emptying the contents of her hands into her lap, she ran her fingers lovingly through the little heap of coins (like a mother running her fingers through the curls of her child), and eagerly began to count the coins she had collected.

Counting aloud, her voice droned monotonously through the kitchen, no other sound breaking the silence.

"Wan . . . two . . . eight . . . ten . . . thirteen . . . fifteen . . ."

Morvenna and Malva watched her with open mouths, though stealing an occasional furtive glance at Ezekiel.

But the crabber kept his eyes fixed moodily on Drusilla's fingers and the coins that she lifted and let drop as she counted them.

"I've got sixty-eight, father," she remarked at last.

"There should be eighty-five there," said Ezekiel gruffly.

"Eighty-five suvrins, faather!" quavered Malva. "Why, wherever ded'ee git them from?" and her eyes questioned him nervously.

Ezekiel sat in the chair so dull and so limply sinewless that he left the impression of one but half awake. He scarcely seemed to have heard his wife's remark: at any rate, he ignored it and again addressed Drusilla. "Thee'll find eighty-five there, ef thee sarch for them," said he.

Drusilla pulled up her dress to make a pouch of its lap, and again began to forage around for the coins.

"Here's some more . . . here's anawther . . . here's a nest of them!" she called at intervals. And then finally: "Seventy-three . . . eighty-one . . . eighty-two . . . eighty-three . . . I caan't find but eighty-three, father," she complained

"There's eighty-five there," said Ezekiel stubbornly.

Drusilla thrust her fingers hither and thither among the wickerwork, took up the tangle of old net and shook it vigorously, and then banged the pot upside-down on the hearth.

Finally two more coins rolled out on the floor.

"There they are!" and Drusilla pounced on them eagerly and gathered them into her lap with the others.

"You was right! There's eighty-five right enough, father," she remarked, as she seated herself at the table and began to place the coins on it, a handful at a time.

"Well—there they are," said Ezekiel gloomily, as he watched her again counting over the coins, and spreading them in a flat, shining mass on the table.

"Eighty-five suvrins!" ejaculated Drusilla, her finger-tips lingeringly feeling their surfaces as she contemplated them lying in a big group in front of her.

"Iss," said Ezekiel, gazing at them strangely: "Twenty ayche for you girls, an' five-an'-forty for your mawther."

"Give mine to mother, father; I don't want them," said Morvenna timidly.

Ezekiel eyed her sombrely. "What about thy new dress for feas'en-tide?" he asked.

"I can do without it, father; I don't really want it. My Sunday one will look nice enough; won't it, mother?"

"Let *me* have Morvenna's share, if she don't want it, father. Shall I?" asked Drusilla, her eyes glittering with eagerness.

"Where ded'ee git them from, faather?" persisted Malva, who, with the swiftly increasing momentum of anxiety, had passed now into a state of keen unrest. The reservations and indefinable half-beliefs of hope had gradually disappeared as Ezekiel stubbornly refused to answer her, and she felt herself now face to face with a great dread that made her tremble. "Where ded'ee git them from, faather?" she reiterated, watching him anxiously.

"Take them or layve them! What do I keer what thee do? I dedn' bring them home for meself," said Ezekiel, still refusing to meet the troubled, pleading eyes of his wife.

"Can you give them back again, father, if we don't want them?" asked Morvenna.

"But I *do* want my share!" interposed Drusilla.

"Iss; when thee can turn the tide," replied Ezekiel, ignoring Drusilla's eager exclamation.

Malva clasped her hands tightly together across her breast and rocked herself to and fro in her chair.

"Was it wan o' they bodies from the wreck?" she ventured tremulously.

"Iss," said Ezekiel, with sudden asperity. Then, noticing the peculiar change in his wife's features, he added sombrely and yet half defiantly, "Now thee knaw all—an' I hope thee'rt satisfied."

Malva's eyes, as she watched him, were tremblingly full of pathos. "Thee done it for we, faather, I do knaw; but I wish thee hadn'."

"Wish! What good'll wishin' do now?" And Ezekiel rose to his feet and began to pace the kitchen restlessly. "Wish! I wish I was dead, come to that."

Malva glanced at her husband with a sudden frightened look, and Morvenna with eyes full of soft, girlish pity; eyes that gradually reflected something of the fear that dusked her mother's.

The air of the little kitchen was heavy with gloom. What in the boat had been only a temptation that could be toyed with, assumed here the aspect and proportions of a tragedy. Ezekiel recognised that there was upon him the doom of one who has sinned deeply: and his recognition of this—his horror of it, and rebellion against it—seemed insensibly to steal the vitality from every one. It was like the stain of a crime soaking slowly through them all: a feeling that guilt was on them, and a wondering doubt as to what it implied.

Even Drusilla, though firm in her desire to retain the money, felt a secret, chilling shiver as Ezekiel voiced the gloom in him. She wanted her feasten-tide finery, it is true; and she quite meant to have it, now that the thing was possible. But she wished (a little drearily) that it had been gained at a lesser cost. If the price of it must be paid in discomfort—well, she begrudged the price.

For some time Ezekiel paced up and down the kitchen, his hands in his pockets, and his brows knitted gloomily. He scarcely tried to think, or even to realise his position:

he was merely full of a strange, aching pain, and of a wordless disappointment as deep as it was bitter.

Presently Morvenna timidly renewed her suggestion. "Couldn't you return the money somehow, father?" she asked softly.

"To who?" quoth Ezekiel, with unexpected harshness. "To the say, who've got the body? or to the Customs in Penzaance?"

"What nonsense!" cried Drusilla. "We got as much right to it as anywan, sim to me. It'll do far more good to we than being at the bottom of Mount's Bay; or in somewan else's pocket, for the matter o' that."

"Aw dear! aw dear!" sighed Malva drearily. "I don't like it 't all. Whatever shall us do? Must us keep it, faather, raily? Cudn'ee return it nohow, don't'ee think?"

Ezekiel burst out into a sudden gust of anger. "Return it? Chuck it into the say, ef thee like! What do I keer what thee do weth it, any of 'ee—cuss the trash!"

"Of course we must keep it now," Drusilla interposed promptly, her fingers still toying with the coins on the table. "I'm much obliged to'ee, father, for *my* share, at any rate. I ar'n't too proud to take a present, if awther folks are." And so saying, she began to count out her share of the money: placing it in a separate little pile in front of her. "Changed your mind—goin' to have yours?" she asked Morvenna.

"I'd rather not—if father don't mind," said Morvenna, watching Ezekiel wistfully as she spoke.

"Darned ef I keer what any of ee' do weth it!" cried Ezekiel impatiently, his deep bass voice striking its angriest note. "Take it out o' me sight! Else I'll chuck it into the fire meself!"

Drusilla went to the dresser and reached down an old-fashioned wooden tea-caddy. In this she slowly, and with something like greedy reluctance, placed the share of the money apportioned to Morvenna and her mother. Her own twenty sovereigns she secured in a corner of her handkerchief, which she then tied into a knot and placed carefully in her pocket.

"Put it upsteers somewhere out o' sight," said Malva, indicating the tea-caddy with a movement of her head.

"In our room, mother?" suggested Drusilla.

"No, please! If mother don't mind," said Morvenna.

"Put it in mine an' your faather's," answered Malva. "Ef it do trouble our draymes, we must put up weth it, s'pose."

Drusilla accordingly lighted another candle and plodded upstairs with the tea-caddy in her hand.

"Come, faather! set down an' take thy supper," said Malva.

"Don't want it—arn't hungry," replied Ezekiel gruffly. And he continued to pace up and down the little kitchen, the sand grating harshly under his heavy boots.

"Nonsense! thee *must* be hungry," said Malva. "Here! come an' set down; we ben waitin' long enough. Take thy tay, Morvenna." And she began to pour out the tea.

Ezekiel seated himself in silence, to put a stop to the discussion; years of married life having taught him this much of wisdom.

For a little while he merely sat with hanging head, staring moodily at the candle and the tea-things on the table. But presently, when Malva and Morvenna were taking their tea, he took up his cup and emptied it at a draught.

Malva hastened to refill it, and again place it before him: and in this way "the ice was broken" at last.

Outside the cottage the night-wind moaned eerily, the distant trampling of the tide was faintly audible at intervals, and the fire roared and flared in the draughty chimney.

The meal was a strangely quiet one, in spite of Malva's attempts to "make conversation," and the sound of Drusilla, light-heartedly singing in her bedroom, apparently did little to dispel the gloom that weighed on those in the kitchen. To Morvenna sitting here dumbly at the table and making a pretence of devoting her attention to her tea, it seemed one of the most cheerless times she ever remembered: second only to that windy, dreary afternoon when her drowned brother was brought in by her father

and Isaac Roscorla, and was laid stark and dripping on the floor beside the hearth.

When the meal was half over, Drusilla came leisurely down the stairs, humming cheerfully to herself a snatch of ranting song. Pouring out some tea, she took the cup in her hand, and seated herself in the settle that was placed close to the chimney. Here, in the cosy neighbourhood of the fire, she drank her tea cheerfully and tried to start a conversation. But the effort ended in a failure so complete that she abandoned the attempt and began to hum instead.

The contrast in mood between the two girls—Drusilla accepting the gold and laughing at the stain on it, and Morvenna as afraid of the money as if it were a serpent—was so great that not even the least observant could ignore it. And Ezekiel, as he pushed away his cup and filled his pipe, fell a-musing with a very bitter flavour in his thoughts.

Vaguely—very vaguely—he recognised the pitiless irony of Fate that had made a punishment for his sin, at the very outset, by its mockery of the way in which he had planned his gift of pleasure: he had intended so much for Morvenna, and to Drusilla had fallen all!

A big blonde woman—she was six-and-twenty—with a soft smooth skin almost satiny in its aspect, Drusilla made an agreeable picture for the eye, and Ezekiel, in other scenes and on other occasions, had often been proud of her attractive appearance. She was somewhat over the middle height, and had the firmly rounded shapeliness of a young wife rather than that of an unmarried woman. Her face, too, like her form, was modelled rather on the lines of curving fulness than on those of daintier grace and charm. She had a short upper lip and a full, rounded chin, moist red lips, of which the lower one drooped slightly—every now and then giving a glimpse of her even teeth—and the irises of her eyes were of a deep blue, in certain lights, in fact, inclining to blackness. Her hair was of a warm, reddish brown, and was of a soft almost silky appearance,

and even in its twisted coils at the back of her head it left the impression of that warm abundance which was so characteristically her "note."

Contrasted with her big, blonde sister, Morvenna, with her rounder, apple-cheeked face, her sweet blue eyes and her frizzle of brown curls, seemed even more girlishly unformed than she actually was—and perhaps also a little more trivial and insignificant. Though it was not unduly small, she had one of the prettiest little mouths imaginable, and there was such a gay and roguish curve in its lines that it was as slyly provocative as it could very well be. The shy affectionateness of her nature (which, perhaps, was her most characteristic trait) was, in fact, revealed chiefly in her voice and in her eyes: eyes of a blue so delicately pure, and at the same time so winsomely sunny in their expression, that to look into them was enough to "turn the head" of a young man and to make an older man almost wish back his youth.

The contrast between the sisters physically and mentally, was almost equally noticeable in their dress. Drusilla had the Cornish fisher's love for brilliant colours and for as much reasonable show as her figure was capable of: whereas Morvenna—her training as a school-teacher perhaps assisting—usually dressed with a sober neatness which, in the homely little interior, gave her an air that was almost refined. As if to accentuate the diversity still farther, while Morvenna was what the girls called "a bit good"—in other words, still retained the fragrance of the Sunday-school and hitherto had escaped being cheapened by sweethearting—Drusilla had the reputation of giving her kisses rather freely, and, although no harm had ever been spoken of her, she had already had more than one sweetheart in her day.

From Ezekiel, of course, half of either's nature was hidden, but he knew enough of both, through the revelations of the hearthside, to feel that Morvenna in her affectionateness came closest to his heart, and that Drusilla, with the heat in her blood making her hungry, was always looking away beyond him towards the world she wanted to reach, and

for which (he told himself as he watched her here this evening) she would thrust him aside gladly — if she only had the chance.

“It was for little Morvenna I done it,” Ezekiel mused bitterly, “an’ the awther wan’ll have all, an’ the little wan nawthin’. Owld Nick have chayted me finely — as I’ve all’ys heerd ’a do.” And the mockery of his sacrifice was as wormwood to his thoughts.

CHAPTER IV

SHADOWS

For two or three days Ezekiel moped considerably. Even when his thoughts had sunk beneath the tide of sleep into the dim underworld of dreams, his experiences apparently unnerved or disquieted him; and morning after morning he rose moody and unrefreshed. The cry and yearning in the blood for the satisfactions of life — satisfactions in which the feeling of being justified to one’s self should be among the uppermost, permeating all; the sense of despair, born of constant disappointment; the anguished thoughts which a man will hide from his fellows, but which his own heart dumbly aches to the pain of: all these seemed blended together vaguely in Ezekiel’s consciousness; till the depression of the mood weighed so heavily upon him that he felt beaten to the ground by Fate and helplessly crushed beneath its heel.

Though he visited his pots and fished for bait as usual, he remained at sea for the briefest period that was possible under the circumstances; and he rarely fished more than a mile or two from land. It seemed to him that all was over: that he must fold his hands and wait his doom.

Gradually, however, he recovered not a little of his elasticity, and fell again into the old daily rut. By the end of a week, he had resumed the ordinary routine of his life with

no appreciable variation in a single detail: at least, none that could have been detected by any one but himself.

In his heart, however, he knew himself—and felt—a different man. He was no longer a man with a clean record for the scrutiny of his fellows, he was a man full of veiled suspicions, a concealed trouble haunting and preying on him; one who, with righteousness as his ideal, had for his familiar a secret sin.

Meanwhile the money, which Ezekiel neither touched nor talked of, played its part silently, but effectively, in the life of the cottage. To Morvenna it was a hateful thing, and, from the fact of being hated, was to that extent a thread in the pattern of her life. Malva loathed it, but thought of it often, and occasionally was even tempted to make use of it. But she resisted the temptation with something of the superstitious feeling that the coins were like serpents' eggs, and she must see first how they would hatch. In other words, she would wait until some one should begin to use them, that she might see what would happen—and perhaps be guided by the result.

But Drusilla had none of these fantastic ideas. She would spend her share of the money, and take the risk—if there were any. Though, that there was really any risk, she pretended entirely to disbelieve.

The morning after she had received her money, she was anxious to go to Penzance to make her purchases; hungering at once to get her weapons for the coming fray at feasting-tide. But her mother interfered, and half dissuaded, half stopped her.

"Wait a day or two: the money may be awned or some-thin'. While 'tes here we can return it: but when 'tes wance spent, the mischief's done," remarked Malva.

"Nonsense! Who's comin' to awn it?" said Drusilla. "The dead waan't come alive merely to frighten we. And suvrins caan't be traced like a cow or a tay-cup." None the less, however, she held her hand in the matter, and, though fuming at the delay, made use of the interval to plan her purchases to the best advantage and to discuss sundry ques-

tions as to colours and materials and other matters of equal gravity.

But on the third morning after the gift of the money, Drusilla could restrain her impatience no longer. When Ezekiel, still glooming, had gone out to his crab-pots and Morvenna was at school busy with her class of infants, Drusilla took the opportunity to inform her mother that she had made up her mind to go to Penzance that afternoon.

"So thee'rt goin' to risk it, are'ee?" asked Malva anxiously.

"Risk what?" quoth Drusilla. "The money's our awn, esn't it? Father gov' me my share, and I mayne to stick to it."

"Folks'll be talkin', ef thee come out in too much finery all of a sudden."

"Well, le' them talk. It's the first chaance I ever got in my life to git a new rig-out from top to toe. I may never git anawther, if I le' this slip."

"Thee'rt thinkin' o' Joe Rosevear," remarked her mother, eyeing her closely.

"Well, if I am, where's the harm?" retorted Drusilla. "P'raps he's the last apple left on the tree, for me. If I shake all my life I may never get anawther."

"Thee'll pay too dear, ef thee pay thyself for'n!"

"I shall risk it, anyhow; if I git the chaance. He's good enough for me, if I'm good enough for he."

"Well, a toad es a jewel in a duck's eye, 'tes true..." began Malva, when Drusilla abruptly cut her short.

"You threw your shoes among the old folks'¹ long before you was my age. There isn' no chaance here for a girl in thaise days; with half the men in America and the other half marr-ried. There's Morvenna'll be comin' to the front in a year or two. And besides I'm gittin' up: six-an'-twenty. Very soon it waan't be, 'Who will I have?' it'll be, 'Who'll have me? and thank you for the chaance!' I've seen that May-game before to-day, and I don't mayne to play a part in it, thank you!"

¹ To "throw one's shoes among those of the old folks," is a local euphemism for getting married.

"Well, well, go thy awn way," said her mother. "Thee'll plaise thy mind ef the plague thy heart, s'pose."

"I'm willin' to take the risk," Drusilla replied carelessly.

Presently, when Morvenna came home from school, she heard of Drusilla's intention and was greatly troubled. She tried hard to dissuade her sister from the undertaking; but Drusilla refused stubbornly to forego her purpose. Morvenna had a kind of superstitious foreboding that the whole of their future might be affected by this jaunt: not only Drusilla's matrimonial prospects, but the general fortunes of the household—their happiness in its entirety: and she accordingly pressed her objections almost to the point of a quarrel. But again she was defeated. Drusilla would not budge an inch from her stubborn purpose.

As this would be the first spending of the money which had fallen into their hands with such a rust of sin on it, what came of spending it now (thought Morvenna superstitiously) might perhaps give them a clue as to how it would act in future, if any one again should be bold enough to draw on it. And the wilfulness of Drusilla in thus tempting Providence in order possibly to be made a "judgment" of, finally assumed in her sister's eyes something of the act of one "possessed": the act of one who was merely an instrument in the hand of something out of sight.

Morvenna shivered for her sister's happiness, but recognised that she was powerless. She could only look on tremblingly and wait for the result.

But if the dead man, now tossing among the weeds of the Atlantic, knew that the money which he had planned for other uses in London was being spent by a crabber's daughter here in Cornwall—the daughter of a man who to his body had refused even the rites of burial—he made no sign, malignant or otherwise. And the gold itself, as it passed from Drusilla's palm into that of the shopkeeper, remained as commonplace, and devoid of any sinister individuality, as if not the faintest stain of a tragedy had touched it from the moment it was coined up to now.

Fate *might* be watching the transaction: but it certainly held its hand.

Trudging home from Penzance with her purchases in her arms, Drusilla, just after passing Newlyn, was overtaken by Joe Rosevear. Joe was a carter in the employ of a Mr. Pengelly, whose mill—the only one in the immediate neighbourhood—was situated at the head of Polurrian valley, about half-an-hour's walk from Ezekiel's cottage. Joe had been delivering some flour to one of the shopkeepers in Newlyn, and was now driving home through the afternoon sunshine, the empty waggon rattling companionably at his back. Espying Drusilla trudging on ahead of him, he at once hastened on, and offered her a lift. Drusilla, of course, accepted willingly; and Joe, jumping down, gallantly assisted her into the waggon, as he was too small a man to lift her in bodily.

Once in the waggon, and the vehicle again rattling homeward, Drusilla and Joe were soon deep in conversation. Drusilla was willing to make the talk as friendly as she dared; but Joe, though an amorous little man in the main, believed he knew his own value (possibly he over-rated it) in the scantily furnished market for husbands in the parish. So he was not anxious to commit himself beyond the possibility of retreat: at any rate, not with a girl whose pockets, presumably, were every whit as empty as his own. Accordingly, although he was willing to be friendly, he restrained his speech, and even his glances, with praiseworthy success. With a success, indeed, too great for Drusilla's contentment, since it left her with only a spider's thread of compliments to cling to, instead of with the six-stranded cable of implied promises which a wooer more ardent would have spun for her under the circumstances.

Joe was a little red-haired man, with a head as round and almost as hard as a cannon-ball, and with a long man's body set on short stumpy legs. He had a carrotty moustache and a thickly freckled face, and a nose at least three sizes too large for him. Yet, in spite of these drawbacks, he con-

sidered himself "reasonably good-looking"; indeed, in more ways than one, decidedly attractive to the womenfolk. And he lived up to the belief with the full gravity of his character. It often amused him to remember how the maidens "eyed" him, and how they "prinked" themselves before him to attract his attention. In fact, the great duel between the sexes, and the fascination (in the last resort, the coercive tyranny) which they exercise over each other, either secretly or openly, was reported to Joe by his alert intelligence, as an individual effect—an impression personal to himself. Accordingly, being anxious not to sell himself too cheaply, Joe was careful to safeguard his utterances to the maidens that he might not be snapped up in spite of himself, and one day find himself (all unexpectedly) being led to church like a lamb to the slaughter-house.

He liked Drusilla, but then he liked other girls also, whether more or less than he liked Drusilla, he was still unable to determine. The motive-impulse that should crystallise his fluid "liking" into "love" had not yet sent its shiver through his heart, and he waited calmly upon Providence for the unfolding of her plans for him, feeling sure that she would treat him as handsomely as he deserved.

Owing to this diplomatic reticence on the part of Joe, it was around "the feast" that the conversation chiefly centred this afternoon, and the exchange of views between Drusilla and her circumspect companion was as reasonably animated as the circumstances permitted.

"'Spect there'll be plenty o' fine feathers 'mong you maidens at the faist," remarked Joe, with a knowing wink at Drusilla's bulky parcels.

"Iss: b'leeve most of us are grawin' them now. The paycocks waan't be in it when we're all on shaw."

"No; 'spect not. We poor bachelors waan't be wanted then. Unless 'tes as looking-glasses, for you maidens to see yourselves in."

"All depends on how thee behave theeselves," said Drusilla. "If thee'rt rayle nice to us, we may be kind to'ee . . . p'raps."

"What! kind to us ayven when you got your best clo'se on!" and Joe pretended to sway on the seat, as if overcome with faintness. "I'm sure I shall be too shy to look at'ee," he protested. "Onless I hold up a cabbage-leaf and geek¹ through the snail-hawls."

"So I fancy!" said Drusilla, with a sly, provocative glance. "Wonder thee warn't too shy to be christened."

"So I 'most was. I cried all the time," said Joe, with a grin.

"Iss; no doubt. 'Spect, as thee'rt so nervous, thee'll be too shy to be 'asked out' in church, when thy time do come."

"Iss; golly! I cudn' face it to be made a king!" said Joe, with another theatrical shudder.

"Thee'll have to, wan day, merely to be made a husband."

"I caan't!" said Joe, holding up his hands in affected horror. "I'm as shy as a slug in a cabbage. I caan't do it raily!" And he pretended to shake all over, like Punch in the puppet-show.

"Strange, a putty young maiden shud make'ee shevver like that! She ha'n't robbed a corpse an' got the cold hand: have she?" called a queer, cackling voice from somewhere near them.

Drusilla and Joe, hitherto oblivious of their surroundings, stared right and left in undisguised astonishment, and suddenly espied, by the side of the waggon, a rickety, weather-beaten pedlar's van, drawn by a small, rough-coated pony, and with a little, humped figure sitting back on the shafts.

"'Tes Tom the Hangman!" cried Joe and Drusilla simultaneously.

The encounter was not a particularly desirable one, owing to the sinister reputation of the pedlar, and the idea that for a courting couple to meet him was scarcely lucky. Joe accordingly whipped-up his horse without a word and drove ahead of the little van as rapidly as he could.

¹ Peer, or pry.

"Iss, drive on as fast as you can!" the queer little figure cackled as they passed him. "You young wans are all'ys in a hurry to git somewheer. No need to hurry! you'll git theer right enough wan day. And there's plenty o' room—it waan't be filled in your time. Drive right ahead! Owld Nick'll make'ee welcome!" and with that he fell to laughing and chuckling to himself.

The pedlar, known as Tom the Hangman, was a swarthy, hairy, undersized individual, with the coarse and somewhat repellent features that characterise the oldest strata of the races in the peninsula—the aboriginal races whom the Celts reduced practically to a condition of slavery. The type, with its marked facial degradation, has persisted down to to-day in nooks and corners of West Cornwall, and, with its beady black eyes, its dark-grained skin and low brow, its stunted stature and its lanky black hair, it is immediately recognisable (from the racial point of view) as an older and inferior survival in the population. In addition to his merely inherited peculiarities, the pedlar had also a troll-foot,¹ and, rightly or wrongly, was generally credited by the peasantry of the district with being as cunning and as spiteful as Old Nick himself. It was admitted, however, that, if he had Old Nick's cunning, he had also Old Nick's cleverness. He was a tinker, scissors-grinder, basket-maker, chair-mender; a pig-sticker, a horse and cattle doctor, a "charmer" of warts and other ailments; a bit of a "conjurer" (which, in West Cornwall, means a dabbler in witchcraft), and, in addition, was a really clever player on the fiddle; the old dark-brown instrument, that he cuddled so lovingly against his chin, being apparently the one thing in the world that he felt affection for.

As if his character were not otherwise unattractive enough, he had once applied for the post of assistant-hangman—the application leaking out through a paragraph in the papers. Although he had failed to obtain the post, the uncanny reputation of this sinister freak of his clung to him persistently

¹ In Cornwwall, club-feet, from their hoof-like appearance, are called troll-feet, and the devil is always spoken of as troll-footed.

for the remainder of his life, and to a certain extent coloured the popular estimate of him. At the mere cry, "Tom the Hangman es comin'!" the children would flee as if for their lives, their faces white with terror, and their little hearts panting like the heart of a captured bird. Even older folks, young girls and young married women, occasionally were as much afraid of him, and experienced as much nervous horror at his presence, as if the taint of death clung to his fingers in reality. While for a bridal or a christening party to meet him on the way to church, was held to be about as unlucky a thing as could happen to it.

Tom travelled up and down in the Land's End parishes with his pedlar's cart and his ragged pony—the latter, in aspect not unlike a moth-eaten door-mat—and wandering to and fro and hither and thither, he knew the winding lanes and byways of the peninsula, its lonely hamlets, and lonelier farmhouses among the hills, as thoroughly as an old, oft-hunted fox knows the crannies and hiding-places of the carn's in its vicinity.

He was well known, by sight, both to Joe and Drusilla; and that the queer little creature knew them equally well on his part, might be taken for granted, considering his sly, prying nature. This was the first time, however, that he had directly addressed either of them—at least, so far as their memories served them—and the uncanny greeting jarred unpleasantly upon both.

Drusilla felt almost as if he had "overlooked" her.¹ And something of the same vague impression seemed to be produced on Joe.

In Drusilla's case, the feeling was deepened by her knowledge that the sinister reference to "robbing a corpse" was not altogether inapplicable to herself. Her thoughts fell into such confusion in consequence, that it took her several minutes to control them and to regain her composure. She gave a swift, furtive look at the parcels lying in her lap, and then glanced uneasily at Joe Rosevear, anxious to see if he

¹ Looked at her with "the evil eye."

showed any sign, however slight, of having found in the pedlar's words the same significance as she did: her guilty conscience hearing in them something of the knowledge of the diviner, or, as she would have put it in her local phrasing, "the knowingness of a witch."¹ But Joe looked merely a little shamefaced and uncomfortable; as if aware that he had shown less wit and presence of mind than might have been expected from him in his position of escort and protector.

"Wish we hadn' mit that ugly little varmunt!" grunted Joe. "Ugly as a capful of adders, I do call un."

"So do I! He gov' me quite a shiver," rejoined Drusilla. "What possessed the little wretch to stayle up to us like that?" And then she added, "He's as deep as the Bay of Biscay, they do say."

"Ugh! I'd like to pull his ears as long as a beagle's for'n! the darned little bucca-davy!"² grumbled Joe.

The encounter had the effect of entirely spoiling the conclusion of the drive. Joe's sparkle of fun was quenched irretrievably: and Drusilla's piquant attitude was equally put an end to.

They drove the remainder of the distance in a state of suppressed discomfort, and finally parted near the mill (where Drusilla had to leave the waggon) with a feeling as if some one had given them a slap in the face.

CHAPTER V

AT THE EDGE OF FAIRYLAND

WHILE Drusilla, with the nubile unrest of six-and-twenty, was trying to shape her life into agreement with her mood (and, with this end in view, was willing to risk almost anything), Morvenna was accepting the vague emotions of her

¹ In Cornwall, "witch" is both masculine and feminine.

² Bucca-davy: a term of contempt. It is really a vulgarisation of the old form of "bucca" (Irish "púca"), a spirit.

springtide with the shy uncertainty and wonder of a nature still in the bud.

As the soft May sunshine steeped the peninsula in its warmth, the vegetation, which had been a little backward in April, had begun to sprout and swell greenly everywhere. In the long, sheltered trough of Polurrian valley, which extended for nearly a mile between the bleak and stony hills, the advance of spring was especially noticeable. The saplings, the bushes, and the flags that clustered around the stream, formed an exquisite mass of greenery along the heart of the valley, and even the slopes of the hills, in spite of their granite boulders, and the exposed margin nearer the sea (with its drift of shingle and fretting sand) appeared to be softened in aspect, and to be subtly quick with life.

Coming out of school this afternoon and finding the valley still full of the soft, warm sunlight, with the cuckoos calling across the stream and the rooks cawing around the school-house, Morvenna decided that, instead of going straight home, she would wander up the valley, to pick some primroses and "cuckoos"—the latter, in West Cornwall, being the name of the blue hyacinth.

Tucking her school-books under her arm she strolled slowly up the glen, searching the nooks for primroses and violets, and occasionally finding a cluster of lilies of the valley, and here and there, near the runlets, a few early forget-me-nots. Below her, where the stream brawled noisily among the boulders—the banks on either side of it being three or four feet high—she could see clumps of yellow water-flags and daintier narcissi, with occasional splashes of gold across the great tufts of broom. And everywhere around her the air was alive with music; the call-notes of cuckoos, the whistling of blackbirds, the cawing of rooks, mingling with the rustling of the wind, the hoarse gurgle of the streamlet, and the humming, drowsy undertone of the bees.

The shadow lying so heavily on the life of the cottage, insensibly seemed to melt away from her thoughts as she wandered here in the delicious sunshine, and a flood of

vaguely sweet stirrings and promptings began to agitate her: the hopes, emotions, and day-dreams of a healthy country girl whose nature was awaking shyly in response to the stimulus of the season.

That great primal impulse, so sweet and yet so terrible—so alluring in its promises and so compulsive in its fascinations—began to trouble Morvenna's thoughts as it was troubling those of other girls.

She was aware, deep in her nature, that she wanted *something*—was it . . . a sweetheart?—some one to love her in another way than that associated with her parents, and some one whom, on her part, she could love in another way, too.

She trembled at—she was half afraid of—the disquieting suggestion. But it was delicious all the same, and, once stirred in her, came to stay.

A thousand mysterious threads running through her consciousness began to flush and tingle with life as she listened to her hopes and trembled; and, shivering delightedly, listened again, and fell a-dreaming at their hints.

At last a sudden timidity seemed to tremble through her: a shyness, strange and inexplicable, that made her hot to the tips of her ears.

She shook herself free from her thoughts (by an effort and somewhat reluctantly), and then, to quiet the importunate buzz of them, began to hum a rhyme she had been teaching her class of infants and sat down against a hedge to arrange her flowers.

As she sat with her school-books in her lap and the flowers spread out on them, a youngster came along the road whistling gaily.

On perceiving her, he abruptly stopped his whistling and began to fidget with his hands at his coat and waistcoat, his sunburned face awkwardly showing his embarrassment.

Morvenna, on her part, merely glanced up for a moment and went on sorting her flowers as before.

Once or twice afterwards, as the youngster was ap-

proaching her slowly, she lifted her head and glanced at him idly, with the expression of one who merely recognises an acquaintance, though without a shadow of emotion or embarrassment.

"Afternoon, Morvenna!" said the youngster, now close to her.

"Good afternoon, Dick!" replied Morvenna, smiling pleasantly.

"Thee got a grand lot o' flowers there, Morvenna," said Dick.

"Yes; pretty fair. Would you like to have a few?"

"Iss, plaise, thaank'ee!" quoth Dick, almost stammeringly.

Morvenna put together a few of each kind and placed them in his hand.

"There you are, then! Some of every sort for you."

"Thaank'ee, Morvenna!" said Dick, his hand trembling as it touched her fingers. And with that he stood stock-still in front of her; staring at her with a face as red as a beetroot, his lips half open and his eyes troubled noticeably.

Morvenna gathered up her flowers with a hasty movement; tucked her school-books under her arm, and rose to her feet.

"Good afternoon, Dick!" she remarked, turning her face homewards.

"Plaise, Morvenna," cried Dick, following her immediately, "Plaise, Morvenna . . ."

She turned and fronted him: a glimmer of fright in her eyes.

"Will'ee have me for a shiner,¹ Morvenna,?" he blurted out.

"No, no, Dick! you mustn't think of it!" cried Morvenna quickly.

"Why not? I ben followin' o'ee up for more'n a year. Though I ha'n't spok' to'ee about it afore, it ben all'ys in me mind . . ."

¹ Sweetheart.

"It's no use, Dick! You must ask some one else. It isn't to be!" said Morvenna firmly.

"Why?"

"Oh . . . why? Well . . . because I say so."

And Morvenna hurried off in the direction of the school-house.

Dick followed her, still pleading.

"But I want'ee, Morvenna! Do'ee say, *Iss!* Morvenna! Do'ee!"

"No, no! Go away, Dick! I couldn't think of it for a minute! You're only vexing me now."

And with that she took to her heels.

"I dedn' mayne no harm!" Dick bawled after her helplessly; standing stock-still in the middle of the road.

But Morvenna was by this time a score yards away, and kept on running without turning her head.

Suddenly, in darting rapidly around a twist in the roadway, she ran full-tilt against the schoolmaster himself.

Quite unable to arrest her movements in the instant of impact, she found her head against his waistcoat and his hands upon her shoulders almost before she realised what it meant and where she was.

"Oh—I beg your pardon!" and, "Why, Morvenna! what's the matter?" were the joint exclamations as soon as they got their breath.

Morvenna's cheeks grew hot with blushes as she murmured shamefacedly, "Dick Laity been teasing me—and I didn't like it." And then, for some reason or other, she added, dropping her eyes, "He wanted to be my shiner—and I didn't want him—and I won't have him."

The schoolmaster thought what a pretty picture she made as she stood there blushing, with her hand full of flowers, and, as if to accentuate the note of girlishness, with her school-books tucked away under her arm.

Morvenna, lifting her eyes, saw him watching her intently, and blushed all the more hotly as she dropped her eyes again.

"I'm very sorry Dick Laity has been so foolish as to tease

you; but you must forget all about it now," said the schoolmaster soothingly. "It won't do to spoil such a beautiful day by crossness; even if a youngster does make a fool of himself." And then he added, smiling pleasantly, as she was aware on glancing upward, "I'll see you home myself, if you still feel upset—shall I?"

"Thank you, Mr. Richards," said Morvenna shyly.

So the schoolmaster turned round, by no means unwillingly, and fell into step with his girlish pupil-teacher. And down the winding lane they walked in the afternoon sunshine, a swarm of busy thoughts buzzing in either brain.

Paul Richards, the schoolmaster, was a fair, slightly built man of thirty-one. He had soft brown hair and a thick and silky moustache (the latter of a hue like that of ripe cornstalks) and grave, steady, light-blue eyes that were sympathetically observant rather than masterful: the eyes of a dreamer, with something of the feminine strain in him, rather than those of a man of action. His pleasant-featured countenance predisposed one to friendliness; and the whole appearance of the man (his careful neatness of dress; his grave, quiet courtesy; and his dreamy and somewhat abstracted air) produced on most people an effect that was distinctly favourable.

Many experiences lay at the back of his thoughts: some that possibly he might never mention, and others that he would draw on occasionally with picturesque effect. Indeed, in fifty different ways, it was very evident that his horizon was wider in every direction than that of his scholars and acquaintances in the cove.

By birth, the schoolmaster was a native of Ludgvan: a small, straggling agricultural village about eight or nine miles from Polurrian cove, and, consequently, for the cove-folk almost in another world. He had lost both his parents—they died within a twelvemonth of each other—some six years previously, when he was barely five-and-twenty, and never having had either a brother or a sister, he counted himself now practically alone in the world. He lodged in a

small cottage kept by an elderly widow—it was almost midway between the schoolhouse and the row of crabbers' cottages—and had been the schoolmaster in Polurrian cove for the last three years. Morvenna Trevaskis at first had been one of his scholars, but he had taken a liking to the girl owing to her sweetness of disposition, and her bright good-temper and alertness of intelligence, and presently, when her school-days were drawing to a close, he had suggested to her parents that she should remain as a paid monitor, and finally should be trained for a pupil-teacher. Malva at first had objected strongly to this, and Morvenna accordingly left school and remained at home for several months. In the end, however, Ezekiel, giving way to Morvenna's coaxing—for the girl liked her master and was anxious to work under him—decided that, at any rate, she might make a start as a monitor. Accordingly, rather less than a couple of years ago, Morvenna had returned to the little schoolhouse and had stuck to it ever since: her liking for her master not diminishing in the interval, and the master's liking for his little assistant decidedly not diminishing either.

When the schoolmaster first became acquainted with Morvenna she was a mere slip of a girl in a short frock, with a big straw hat and a white "mocket-apron"; and with her hair flying wildly over her shoulders every day except Saturday, when it was usually done up in plaits in preparation for the Sunday. As often as not, when the schoolmaster met her out of school, she was munching a piece of bread and butter, or nibbling a hunk of cake: and from the shower of crumbs that occasionally dropped about her in school, when she pulled out her handkerchief without due preparation, he surmised that her pocket as a rule was used as a kind of larder. This was when Morvenna was barely fourteen, and the schoolmaster (as near as possible) was about eight-and-twenty. In those days Morvenna, on the least provocation, would show her white teeth merrily in a burst of laughter anywhere and everywhere, in school or out: and her tongue was almost as unembarrassed as her smile. The schoolmaster made a bit

of a pet of her from the first, and, though he often passed other children without noticing them, he never met Morvenna without greeting her pleasantly—enjoying the sunny piquancy of her smile with a frank relish that his seniority seemed to him to excuse.

But three years had wrought a great change in their relations.

Morvenna, at seventeen, felt too old to be petted familiarly; and the schoolmaster, even with his one-and-thirty years, was no longer such a wide stretch ahead of her on the road of life that his voice was oracular and almost impersonal for her. Or, at any rate, if still oracular, it was not in the olden way.

And the schoolmaster—well, Morvenna was no longer for him a little sister whom he could pet almost without any sense of responsibility. He felt his seniority to its full extent still: even more, perhaps, than Morvenna did at present. But what she was for him he scarcely knew: besides, what good would it do to define it? And what she might be to others—to the youngsters of the village, her contemporaries—he was not at all anxious to consider too closely. She was at present his pleasant little pupil-teacher—always with a smile ready for him still, if he cared to evoke it—and what more could he ask at *his* age, or . . . what more was he likely to get?

When Morvenna had told him that Dick Laity wanted to be her sweetheart, he had felt a tug at his heart that quite surprised him; followed by a dull, dreary ache which even her petulant avowal that “she didn’t want Dick and wouldn’t have him” was little calculated to allay permanently, although it might soothe him for the moment. For, in spite of Dick’s dismissal, a cheerless sense of fatalism—of the *inevitableness* of a loss, of a change, that he would feel keenly—still remained gloomily at the back of the schoolmaster’s thoughts. To Morvenna, with her youth, belonged the things of youth—the enchantment of young love, of young happiness, of sweet illusions; the irrepressible lilt and buoyancy of life; and all the exquisite freshness that comes of experiences still

to investigate and an outfit of expectancy as yet unwasted and unimpaired. This the schoolmaster recognised clearly, and would not willingly have gainsaid. But, all the same, the fact of her world being so young and jocund—so full of the singing of birds and of the glamour of the springtide—made him seem, in his own mind, entirely out of place in it: as much out of place as a tree laden with ripe berries would look in the midst of a hedge of flowering hawthorn. True, Morvenna in her waywardness, or in the unripeness of her emotions, had not let the first youngster seize her as his prize: but the schoolmaster was aware that this dismissal of *one* youngster must not be taken as implying that she was prepared to reject them all. Their youth was in their favour; and so, presumably, would be her heart. With the fatal current of nature, setting steadily and persistently against him, it would be absurd for him to fight, thought the schoolmaster with a sigh. And with this he set his face to accept the inevitable, and walked along by Morvenna's side with as cheerful a mien as he could command.

Meanwhile Morvenna kept strangely and perplexingly silent. Shy, agitated, and hot with blushes, she walked along with downcast eyes, her elbows almost touching his. Her sunny gaiety of manner had vanished unaccountably, and any one watching them, without a due knowledge of the situation, would have taken them for a pair of lovers who had quarrelled and were ill at ease.

Presently, however, the schoolmaster tried to pull himself together and talk to his companion with something of the ease of friendly chat. He began to praise the flowers she had gathered and asked where she had obtained them, remarking that her forget-me-nots were the first he had seen that spring.

"Yes, they're pretty; arn't they?" responded Morvenna, glancing up shyly.

"Almost as pretty as my little pupil-teacher," said he gallantly.

Morvenna coloured rosily, and dropped her eyes.

"Now you're teasing me," she murmured.

"No, no. You've had enough teasing for one day. It was merely a thought I had. They seem to me just to match your eyes."

Morvenna looked up again: this time smilingly. "Would you like some of them?" she asked shyly.

"If it wouldn't look out of place—an old man wearing them in his coat."

"You're not so old as *that*, Mr. Richards!" began Morvenna, and then stopped, confused at her own impetuosity, and began to fidget with the flowers, which she shifted uneasily in her fingers.

"As old as what?" asked he smilingly, but with eyes watching her face intently.

"Oh . . . not too old to wear flowers," murmured Morvenna.

"Then, if you think so, Morvenna, we'll let it be so," said the schoolmaster: "and I'll wear them with pleasure, if you'll spare me two or three."

Morvenna picked out all the forget-me-nots she had and handed them to him with a kind of shamefaced air. Her eyes watching him warily, as if she were afraid he was making fun of her.

"Oh no, I mustn't rob you of all of them," said he. "You must keep some for yourself."

"I would rather *you* had them." And her face flushed with a warm rosiness delightful to witness.

"But you will take some from me, won't you? Then we shall both have a share of them."

"Yes: if you want me to."

"It would please me, if you would."

"Yes . . . then I will," replied Morvenna, almost in a whisper.

On which the schoolmaster divided them fairly, and handed her back half of them.

"Thank you, Mr. Richards," said she, colouring under his glance.

"Thank you, Morvenna," said the schoolmaster: and

he placed the flowers in his buttonhole. "Then you won't wear yours, Morvenna? You see, I'm wearing mine!"

Morvenna blushing placed the forget-me-nots in an opening of her bodice.

"That's right!" said the schoolmaster, nodding his head approvingly. And he glanced from her bodice to his buttonhole with a pleased, appreciative air. "Now we look like two friends: as I hope we are—arn't we?"

"Yes," whispered Morvenna, with her old, wary shyness.

"Then I'm content—if you are?" said the schoolmaster questioningly.

"Yes," murmured Morvenna; if possible, shyer than ever.

"That's a good girl! Now I'm satisfied!" said the schoolmaster.

And with this, they smiled at each other, and walked on lightly, feeling that, in some way or other, the May sunshine had entered into them, and the Spring, with all its exquisite promises, was in their veins.

Presently they emerged from the hedged-in cartway on to the open space near the mouth of the cove. This was a shelterless stretch of ground, several acres in extent, covered with coarse grass and coarser weeds, and interspersed everywhere with pebbles and drifted sand. Clumps of the glaucous-coloured sea-holly and patches of sea-spurge grew here and there among the sand and pebbles, while the brighter little sea-pinks (now in full flower) were scattered up and down by thousands among the coarse salty grass, and were almost as numerous as the daisies were in the fields farther inland. Midway through the patch of common (if such it could be called) ran the broad but shallow stream that drained the valley—in winter swelling almost into a mountain-torrent, but in summer scarcely deep enough to reach to the knee of a child. At one point the stream was crossed by granite stepping-stones—great brown boulders a foot and a half high—while at another point, farther up, there was a rickety wooden structure fashioned by the cove-folk out of drifted-in wreck-wood, and having on one side of it a broken oar

used as a hand-rail: the little structure being dignified by the name of "the bridge." The row of crabbers' cottages—they were five in all—stood on the opposite side of the cove, about a furlong from the end of the cartway: and Ezekiel's little dwelling was the one nearest to the stream: the tiny window of Morvenna's bedroom, in the end-wall of the cottage, looking directly towards the point where the cartway ended abruptly.

The schoolmaster, glancing across at the row of thatched cottages, noticed the sun shining brightly on the diminutive squares of the window, and remarked casually to Morvenna, "Looks as if you had a light in your bedroom—doesn't it?"

"Yes: so it does!" replied Morvenna smilingly: thereby giving him the clue he had angled for.

On which he added, shaking his head at her with pretended severity, "You see, if ever you're a naughty girl and get reading in bed by candlelight, I may find it out, Morvenna. And then, won't you get a scolding when you come to school in the morning!"

"Yes, but first you would have to watch..." and then she stopped, and crimsoned hotly.

"Oh, I see lots of things—wandering about in the cove of an evening. I have seen *you* occasionally, learning your lessons out on the sea-front."

"I have seen *you*, sometimes," ventured Morvenna shyly.

"Yes, and I shall be down here often in the summer evenings. I find it much fresher than farther up the valley. Perhaps I shall see you out learning your lessons now and then."

There was something like a note of interrogation in his voice, and Morvenna glanced up at him with her face glowing softly; a timid, girlish questioning in her eyes.

"You won't keep indoors because of me, will you?"

"No," she answered shyly.

"Not however often I come?"

"No," said Morvenna again.

"Is that a promise, Morvenna?"

"Yes," she almost whispered.

The schoolmaster held out his hand.

Morvenna put her hand in his: and the schoolmaster grasped it warmly and held it lingeringly.

"Well, good afternoon, Morvenna," he remarked reluctantly, as Morvenna gently slid her hand out of his. And then he added, "What a pleasant little walk we've had; haven't we?"

"Yes, I've enjoyed it," said Morvenna simply.

"So have I!" he replied emphatically. "I wish we could have one like it every day after school. It would do us a world of good, after the noise and worry; wouldn't it?"

"Yes . . . I think so . . . perhaps."

"Then shall we have one to-morrow?"

"Oh . . . no. I'm afraid . . ."

"Why not? Wouldn't you like it?"

"Yes . . . I should like it," she replied shyly.

"Then say '*yes*'—there's a good girl!" said the schoolmaster.

"Yes," answered Morvenna, after a little pause.

The schoolmaster looked into her blue eyes earnestly: and was aware of new depths in them which he had still to fathom. He held out his hand again, and shook hers warmly. "You're the best little girl in the world, I think, Morvenna!"

"Good afternoon, Mr. Richards," replied Morvenna timidly. And, slipping her hand out of his, she put her foot on the nearest stepping-stone and was on the other side of the stream in less than half a minute.

"It's too good to be true: I mustn't deceive myself," said the schoolmaster, as he turned slowly and retraced his steps up the valley.

"Oh! it's too good to be true! I'm *sure* it is!" Morvenna panted softly, as she went up to the cottage door.

And just then Ezekiel, gloomily rounding Carn Bargis, was muttering to himself, as he caught sight of his little cottage, "Ef I cud onnly wake up and find it all a drain!"

CHAPTER VI

SECRETS

THE purchases Drusilla had made were not flaunted before Ezekiel, nor in any way deliberately brought under his notice; rather, they were sedulously concealed from him by every means that was possible, Drusilla's contrivances to this end being aided by Malva with nervous watchfulness; a watchfulness whose motive Morvenna thoroughly comprehended, though, for her part, she declined to assist in any of their stratagems.

"Ah, me cheeld," said Malva the next morning to Drusilla, eyeing the finery moodily as it lay spread out on the kitchen table, "when all's said an' done, they're dear, terrible dear! They arn't wuth a hundredth part what they cost—they things!"

"I'm sure, mother, I got them as reasonable . . ."

"*Thee* got them!" cried Malva. "No, no, me cheeld! thee ha'n't paid the price for them yet, by a long way. Thee'lt pay for them in more than money, I'm thinkin', me cheeld: ayven ef thee paid the money twice ovver—every shillin' of it. They've cost thy poor faather his paice o' mind in this world; an' what they'll cost un in the next, the dear Lord alone do know!" And at this Malva turned her eyes from the finery on the table to peer out through the panes at the wide stretch of sea, scanning the lonely wastes with a pathetic wistfulness. The sea had robbed her of her sons, and now, in *his* turn, her husband . . . Malva shivered drearily at her thoughts: her eyes troubled strangely. What if, one day, it also should rob her of *him*!

"Here! clear away they things! I hate the sight o' them, I tell'ee!" she cried suddenly, with something almost like fierceness. "Clear them out o' me sight, will'ee! I'd as soon see death-linen lyin' there." And she turned her back on the things and went to stand on the doorstep.

"Now you're talkin' silly, mother," said Drusilla discontentedly. But she gathered up the things and removed them to her bedroom, where she spent the remainder of the morning planning (with many changes of mind) how she would have them made up and who should do the work.

By the time Morvenna came home to dinner, Drusilla had arranged everything satisfactorily in her thoughts. And when Morvenna set off for school in the afternoon, Drusilla walked with her up the valley, her arms full of packages, being bound for Newlyn, to visit a dressmaker there and get her outfit put in hand.

Just ahead of them in the lane they presently discerned the schoolmaster, who was finishing his after-dinner pipe before going into school.

As soon as she perceived him, a light leaped into Morvenna's eyes and a sudden colour suffused her cheeks, till she looked (even to Drusilla) as pretty as a flower.

"My! so thee've picked out Mr. Richards for a shiner, have'ee?" quoth Drusilla, in a tone of mocking banter. "Well, thee waan't be the first, not by a long chalk, I'm thinkin'. He ha'n't reached *his* age, I'm sure, without having had a sweetheart. As likely as not," she added maliciously, "he got wan now, somewhere out o' sight."

"You are always talking about sweethearts; I wish you wouldn't!" protested Morvenna, looking distressed and uncomfortable.

"And thee'rt always thinkin' about them, I'll go bail," retorted Drusilla, with a touch of temper. "The slyer the cat, the more cream she do git."

"Don't, Drusilla! He might hear you: and what would he think of us!"

"Don't keer ef he do, for my part: he's nawthin' to me. He've heard wuss than that, I 'spect. And said wuss, too, in his day; trust un."

"Well, I care, if you don't."

And Morvenna drew away from her, and slackened her pace to drop behind.

"Iss, no doubt. I'm spoilin' the cream for'ee, thee do

think. But there! come on: don't make a little fool of theeself. Thee may be in love with un so much as thee like: it waan't harm'ee, that I do knaw of. But thee'll never git un in this world: thee may make up thy mind to that."

Morvenna's eyes had in them something of the discomfort of a child who has suffered an unexpected blow, or an inexplicable rebuff. The troubling of the waters by Love had already begun in her: whether it would be for her happiness, was something that still remained to be seen.

She glanced sideways at her sister, but made no remark. And the twain walked on in silence until they overtook the schoolmaster, who was loitering to get the last few whiffs from his pipe.

The schoolmaster's greeting of Morvenna, Drusilla watched with close attention; making the girl more hot and confused than ever, and causing the schoolmaster also just a ripple of surprise. He wondered if Morvenna had been making a confidante of her sister: wondered with just a little shrinking-into-his-shell of suspicion.

But a second glance at Morvenna in her girlish embarrassment — vexed, or confused, by the combined scrutiny of her sister and himself—swept the shadow from his thoughts, and he felt ashamed of himself for harbouring it. She was as fresh and sweet as the hawthorn blossoms; and, if he doubted it, he deserved to be tarred and feathered for a scarecrow.

"And are *you* coming in to assist us this afternoon?" he asked Drusilla, as they came to the door of the schoolhouse. "As a great favour, we might let you take Morvenna's class for once. It would lighten the day's work for both of us, wouldn't it?" he asked, glad of the opportunity to look direct into Morvenna's eyes. And he added, smiling into them, "And we need it; don't we, Morvenna?"

"I don't know, Mr. Richards," replied Morvenna, smiling confusedly.

"Not to-day! thank you," Drusilla answered lightly. "Let every cobbler hold his awn lapstone, is my motto." And

she gave a sly, malicious glance at her sister's crimsoning cheeks.

"And a very good motto, too!" the schoolmaster replied, as he threw open the door and followed Morvenna into the school.

Drusilla, as she left the little schoolhouse behind her, and walked briskly up the valley in the warm sunshine, began to pass in review, according to her mental capacity, the tangled incidents and moods of the last few days: and she decided promptly that she would be best off out of the coil. The hints of possible sweethearting between her sister and the schoolmaster; her mother's strange fear of the money that had fallen to them—a blind terror whose insistent utterance and uncanny character had begun almost to affect Drusilla herself; and the heavy, wearying gloom that clung to her father so depressingly (making the house, when he was in it, seem as if it held a corpse): none of these was productive of so much pleasure in the retrospect that Drusilla felt unwilling to turn her back on them, if possible.

If Joe would only give her the chance, or if, by adroit management, she could bring him to the point to-morrow, she would marry him out of hand, and take the risk gladly!

To be a wife! . . . Her blood rioted in her veins at the suggestion; and the memory of scores of kisses (some from this youngster, and some from that, the sweetest of all, in her memory, being those from Robert Pengelly) did little to allay the heat and the restless sting of it. She would be a wife to-night, if it were possible, without a shadow of hesitation: the *man's* personality being a mere matter of detail, which Fate could settle for her by any blind shuffle of its own.

True, like other young women, she would have preferred to "fall in love" with the man who was to be her husband: be attracted to him by the subtle fascination of passion, and, in gaining him as her life-mate, gather up into this all imaginable satisfactions. It was certainly by no means her wish to miss the romance and fun of love-making, and from the mere experiences of the daughter, drowsing sluggishly

at her mother's fireside, plunge straight, and all in an instant, into the experiences of the wife. Still, if happiness in its many-sided totality were to be denied to her, she would certainly not refuse so much of it as she could get. She desired a husband above all things: it was her master-ambition. If he had blossomed out of the sweetheart—out of Robert Pengelly, for instance . . . But—as this was not to be—she would give herself to him all the same. As others had done before her, she would trust to chance to redress the balance when she had a baby at her breast as the fulfilment of her nature, and was free of all the mysteries and freemasonry of the world of wives. No doubt, these would satisfy her amply. She was willing, at any rate, to take the risk.

With that, she fell to thinking irritably of Joe, whose plaguy shilly-shallying unsettled her in this way. Why didn't he come forward and propose to her like a man? He needn't be afraid of her, if that were the difficulty. He might very well guess that he could have her for the asking. Perhaps, in fact, it was this that made him so indifferent. Thinking that he had only to lift his finger and she would come running to him, he felt that he could dawdle just as much as he pleased: he could always lift his finger, when he felt so inclined.

Bother the fellow, why should he tantalise her like this! She wished she could afford to throw him over—or could quicken his jog-trot into a run. She wished his veins, for a man, had less ditchwater in them—bother him! She wished . . . oh! anything! so that this dawdling might come to an end!

If the schoolmaster, for instance, should think seriously of Morvenna, she would be bound *he* wouldn't dawdle when he wanted to put the ring on her! The little prim-looking chit, for all she seemed so shy, might get the laugh of her after all, and be a wife and mother before she was! Oh, bother the fools of men! why couldn't they marry and have it over, while the fun was worth having! If a woman had to do the asking—it would be something like a world, *then*!

While she was in this mood, she emerged from the lane into the highway, and, having a long jaunt in front of her before she reached Newlyn, she hurried on briskly in the hot sunshine, her thoughts growing so vague, or slipping through her brain so indistinctly, that they made no more than a mere blur in the eye of her mind.

Suddenly she heard the mocking sound of a fiddle, and, looking around in surprise, she perceived Tom the Hangman sitting on the gate of an adjoining farmyard, his fiddle at his chin and his hand jigging the bow lovingly.

An odd feeling that the music had in it a note of cruelty, a kind of cold, sneering laughter as of one mocking at pain of some kind, crept stealthily through Drusilla's nerves as soon as she caught the run of it.

"Ben stickin' a dear li'l pig, poor crayture! A li'l fat white wan: f'r'all the world like a kickin' baby. Doin' this to cheer un up in his laast moments, poor li'l dear!"

As the pedlar volunteered this information, Drusilla stared up at him with her eyes rounding in amazement.

That to express pity for an animal struggling in its death-throes, is to lengthen out its agony instead of alleviating it, is a superstition firmly rooted in the peninsula. And Drusilla felt a sudden qualm of nausea attack her as she heard the shrill squealing of the pig in the adjoining farmyard while the pedlar kept emphasising his pity for his victim, with his bow jigging merrily up and down all the time.

He seemed to her so maliciously evil in his cruelty, that it struck her all at once—the blood throbbing wildly in her veins at the suggestion—that here was a man *almost* as black-hearted as Old Nick himself! A witch, and no one knew what—and it was always the wicked ones who had power—was he worth resorting to in an emergency? she wondered, trembling at the idea. Was it worth going to him in a case, say . . . like that between herself and Joe?

She had heard whispers of such things as charms to compel love, to produce maternity in a barren woman, to punish a faithless sweetheart, and such like: was there a charm to make a man marry a girl—willing, and he a laggard? If

so . . . if there were . . . did Tom the Hangman know it? And, if he did . . . should she ask him to use it on her behalf?

The temptation was so imperious, all her nature consenting and urging her to test its value (since the uncanny little creature looked so evilly capable), that in another second Drusilla would have blurted out her question: it was even now on the tip of her tongue and in her consciousness was shaped already.

But at that moment the pedlar, in his crafty, wheedling way, remarked, as he lowered his fiddle and fixed his beady eyes on her, "Ben a wreck in Polurrian cove, have 'a, me dear?"

"Eh?" replied Drusilla, bewildered for an instant.

"Faather come into a fortune, have 'a? Found a body from the *Gannet*, p'raps?"

"Eh?" repeated Drusilla. And then, realising the question, she fell into a sudden confusion that made her lower her eyes affrightedly and colour hotly and furiously, as if she had been surprised in something criminal.

"Lots o' money on un, no doubt?" queried the pedlar, eyeing her closely.

"You silly owld gawk! You're as wicked as you're silly, b'leeve!"

And Drusilla turned on her heel and walked away rapidly.

"Arms full o' passles,¹ an' a heart full o' saycrets—what 'ud Joe Rosevear say, ef 'a shud overtake'ee now?" the pedlar called after her, watching her keenly.

"I b'leeve he got daylins with Owld Nick hisself! What a turn he gov' me, to be sure! Wish I'd put it off for a day or two!" were some of the agitated thoughts that ran rapidly through Drusilla's mind, as she hurried along the highway with the pedlar calling after her. "But there! he caan't knaw nawthin'; how shud 'a?" she insisted, nervously trying to reassure herself. "'Tes onnly is evil gissin'. I was a fool to stop and stare at hun.

¹ Parcels.

What a good job I dedn' ask that what I mayned to! I waan't look at un agen—the ugly little toad!” And with this she hurried on so rapidly in the blazing sunshine that the perspiration trickled over her face like water. “I wouldn' for the world have father or mother know about it!” she mused anxiously: “they would never forgive me, if I got them into trouble through *he*.” And then, “Bother that Joe! 'tes all his fau't!—But I'll git un, if git un I can!” she decided, setting her lips determinedly. “Lord, what worry! an' all for a fool like he!”

CHAPTER VII

THE CRABBER AND HIS WORLD

WHEN Ezekiel saw Drusilla, in all her finery, on the morning of “feasten Sunday,” he made no comment, but glanced wistfully at Morvenna.

The “little one,” as he often called her, was dressed in her ordinary Sunday clothes which she had been wearing now for several months, and she had not a single new ribbon, or bit of fresh finery, anywhere on her person, so far as he could discover: and his eyes had travelled over her anxiously from her hat down to her shoes. Still Morvenna showed not the slightest sign of jealousy: though beside Drusilla, at present, she looked a girl beside a woman. There was a strange happiness in her eyes—a girlish sweetness and shyness, as of one in a delightful reverie—and her lips had the winsome curves of what one might call smiles in the bud. It was very evident to her father that she was troubled with no gloom at her lack of finery. Indeed, he fancied a new demureness, a new gaiety—something that eluded him—was every now and then discoverable in her face: not unlike the fleeting dazzle of sun-glints playing across the bay on a summer afternoon. He was glad at heart that it was there—this indefinable glint of happiness—

but he wondered a little, all the same, what it meant and what had caused it.

"Goin' up weth thy sester?" he asked her suddenly.

"No, father; I'm going to chapel as usual," replied Morvenna.

"Goin' up after denner?" persisted Ezekiel, eyeing her closely.

"Yes, father; if you'll let me," said Morvenna, with an air of embarrassment.

"Why, o' coorse, me dear! o' coorse! Onnly too glad for'ee to enjoy thyself!" replied Ezekiel heartily, his eyes clearing perceptibly.

"Yes, but, father," and here Morvenna coloured and grew confused, "Mr. Richards, father, wants me to go up with *him*. He told me to ask you if I might . . . and he would take care of me . . . if you'll let me. He knows the schoolmaster at Choone, father: and he's going to call at his house and have tea there . . . if we go. That is . . . if you'll let me go, father . . . if you don't mind."

"Eh?" said her father.

And "Eh?" ejaculated her mother.

"Oh my! *Mr. Richards*, Miss Prim!" cried Drusilla maliciously.

Ezekiel and Malva glanced at each other; while Morvenna stood beside the table with her face flushing rosily, as she fidgeted with her hymn-book, and studied the fingers of her glove.

"Well," said Ezekiel, after a pause, "ef he do call for her after denner, s'pose we can lev' her go, mawther?"

"Rests with *thee*, faather," replied Malva, her eyes mutely consenting.

"Well, lev' it rest at that," said Ezekiel, watching Morvenna closely.

Morvenna lifted her shining eyes. "Thank' you, father!" she replied brightly, her voice buoyant with happiness. And with that she wished them all "good morning," and set off for chapel with something of the glad impatience of a child.

"Wonder, now, es it merely friendliness, 'cause she do work onder un—or, es there anything else behind it?" queried Ezekiel, looking at Malva.

"Makin' up to ayche awther, you bet!" cried Drusilla.

"Time'll shaw! time'll shaw!" was Malva's response. "Anyhow, he's a trustworthy man, es Mester Richards: he wedn' hurt a heer of her head, I feel sartin."

"I ha'n't studied un much; I must do so," said Ezekiel. "The little wan do sim to me alterin' in some way."

"They all do, when that do begin," Malva replied sententiously.

"Ay, but this es a funny world!—I must study un closer," said Ezekiel, resuming the thread of his previous thought. "The little wan . . . I thought she'd be free from this for years."

"P'raps now 'tes onnly friendship: he bein' her maaster."

"Onnly friendship! what fiddlesticks!" said Drusilla impatiently, swinging her skirts in her hand and watching the fall of them. "'Tes *courtin'* they're thinkin' of, the both of them: trust them for that!"

"Hush, faather!" said Malva gently; having caught some muttered exclamation from her husband.

"Ay, I'll hush," quoth Ezekiel gloomily.

Drusilla would have liked to hang about the cottage in order to be present at the advent of Mr. Richards, and critically to watch Morvenna's behaviour on the occasion: but she decided that her own "affair of the heart" urgently required that she should be present at the "parade" in Choone. Accordingly, shortly after Morvenna started for chapel, Drusilla set out to see the feasten-tide display.

The greater part of the morning, while Malva was busy preparing the dinner, Ezekiel sat out on the sea-front on the ridge of shingle, his elbows on his knees and his head supported between his hands, and in his mouth an ancient pipe that half the time was "out."

As he sat here in the hot and glittering sunshine, as unmoving as a cormorant when it is sated, in fact, almost as motionless as a figure carved in stone, Ezekiel's grey-blue

eyes were fixed sternly on the sea: fixed on it with a regard so grim and steadfast that it seemed as if the great purring monster (for the moment subdued into one of its stealthy feline moods) had fascinated him as a snake is said to fascinate a bird. Fascinated him with the fascination not of love or sympathy, but of horror, of something fatal, something it would be useless for him to resist. The man looked like one who had had a revelation of something profoundly disquieting: something whose memory (for his punishment) he was unable to shake himself free from: or . . . like one who had sinned deeply, and knew himself isolated, even as Cain.

About half-a-dozen crabbers were scattered along the sea-front. A couple stretched at full length on a sandy grass-patch; another lying on the crest of the ridge of pebbles, with the glassy, rippling, tremulous heat-glimmer wavering across his face till he looked almost like one drowned; and the others seated and leaning their backs against an upturned boat, in whose half-shadow they were smoking lazily and as lazily gossiping between the puffs.

But none of them approached, or meddled with, Ezekiel, who, seated about a score or so yards from his cottage door, supported his head in his hands and gazed fixedly at the sea, as isolated, and with almost as deep a touch of aloofness, as the raven that sailed to and fro across the valley every now and then uttering its harsh, boding *caw*!

Ezekiel had been by preference a solitary man (keeping rigidly to himself whether at work or resting ashore) ever since the sea had robbed him of his sons. Before then, though somewhat taciturn, he had been reasonably sociable, after the grave, undemonstrative fashion of his class. But from the day when his sons were drowned Ezekiel had changed noticeably. The two lads (one was fifteen and the other in his seventeen) were working on a fishing-boat during the winter mackerel-season and had been drowned by the boat being run down off Scilly: the steamer that cut

them down skulking off in the darkness, leaving the crew of the fishing-boat to perish miserably. From that time—and this was half-a-dozen years ago—Ezekiel had settled into a man whose grim and moody loneliness (though at first sociably battled against by his friends and neighbours) had to be accepted as something inevitable and not to be changed. To-day his acquaintances in the cove would as soon have thought of “shooting” their pilchard nets in the middle of May or “laying down” their crab-pots a week before Christmas, as of trying to break through the reserve of Ezekiel Trevaskis, or expecting him to gossip with them hands-in-pockets and pipe-in-mouth.

The mind of man is always tragically lonely. Separated from its fellows by the fact of its individuality, it is baffled and hedged-in in every direction by imprisoning obstacles that accentuate its solitariness. Never certain as to the actual thoughts of its fellows; never able adequately to express its own: or, from a complexity of reasons, restrained from expressing fully its own tangled and obscure ideas—ideas which, to utter, it must (as it were) cut the umbilical cord of, thus separating them from the life that alone justifies and explains them—how, thus baffled and confused, should it be otherwise than lonely? At his best, a man can but indicate, as in a series of hieroglyphics, something vaguely like the stirrings and promptings he is aware of: and the knowledge of his incompetency—of the tragic inadequacy of his efforts—intensifies his sense of forlorn isolation till, in the end, he seems to move through a world of mere phantoms: the only realities being himself, and that which makes alive and kills. To the educated man, to brood over this phase of life's perplexities often means madness, if he pursue the theme morbidly. But in the uneducated peasant it induces a great and profound sadness, something that enfeebles him with as deep a melancholy as if he were robbed of a sense.

When to this initial gloom is added the shadow of tragic misfortune, even, perhaps, the sinister shadow of sin, then is the flavour of life spoiled for the man completely and

irremediably, and, in the end, he becomes as moody and morose as one distraught.

In Ezekiel Trevaskis—melancholy by racial blood-gift, and by his occupation forced into exceptional solitariness—the gloom engendered by baffled sympathies and inadequate expression had become morbidly accentuated: at first, by the loss of his sons; and afterwards, by the sin into which he had plunged blindly; and the man now was as grimly moody as he could be and keep sane.

As he sat here on the sea-front this morning, supporting his head in his hands, Ezekiel's face wore an expression so depressingly hopeless that, if Malva could have seen (side by side) his face as she remembered it as a wooer and his face now as a husband, her heart would have ached at the contrast almost to the pitch of tears.

But Malva was busy with her cooking, and Drusilla with her courting, and Morvenna was busy watching the school-master and building castles in the air, and Ezekiel, who had thought and toiled so anxiously for all of them, was left to "dree his weird" forlornly: his body as lonely as his mind.

At dinner, Morvenna could scarcely eat, owing to suppressed excitement: but she concealed her agitation as much as possible, and tried to believe that neither her father nor her mother noticed it.

As a matter of fact, however, there was not a phase of her unrest that escaped their observation. The hot colour in her cheeks, the smiles that wavered around her lips, even the unusual brilliancy and dilation of her eyes, were all noted in spite of her half-shamed concealment of them. Indeed, the delight and the secret eagerness that fluttered her, were as patent as the sunshine that played on the window-panes, or the murmur of the sea that came floating through the door.

Happily, Drusilla was staying to dinner at an acquaintance's in Choone: so Morvenna was spared the malicious teasing to which she would have been subjected by her sister, and was neither vexed by fretting speech nor by

irritating scrutiny. In as far as it was more than one of quiet observation, her mother's attitude towards her was smilingly sympathetic: her father's grave in its wistfulness, but certainly not unkind. Indeed, the significant tenderness she now and then surprised in her mother's eyes, made Morvenna's heart glow warmly with affection. Though she blushed a little with ashamed delight at it, she rejoiced in it none the less.

Presently came the schoolmaster, quiet and courteous as ever.

On entering the cottage, not for the first time, certainly, but for the first time with such keen alertness of thought and with such a vaguely new attitude towards Malva and Ezekiel—his attitude towards Morvenna being in an altogether different category—the schoolmaster (without appearing to do so) studied the poor, plain interior and the ageing couple who called it "home," with a peculiarly vivid interest and notation, though he would have found a difficulty in putting his motive bluntly into words.

Malva seemed to him a good, motherly soul: a peasant housewife with the saving virtues of her class, and perhaps with but few (and those the most pardonable) of its faults. He imagined that, in all probability, she was thrifty, hard-working, affectionate, narrow-minded, scrupulously clean in her person as well as in her house, suspicious (with the peasant's suspicion) and proud (also with the peasant's pride). And he decided that, as a mother for Morvenna—the shaping feminine force the girl inevitably would be moulded by—Malva, no doubt, was as harmless as could be expected under the circumstances.

But Ezekiel's was a problem he could not so easily grapple with. There was something latent in the man's face—something buried in its wrinkles, something concealed in the depths of his eyes—that the schoolmaster could by no means get on the track of: at least, in a casual interview like the present one. There was either a great secret, or a great sorrow, hidden somewhere in the man's life: and

which it was, or whether it were both, the schoolmaster was unable to decide.

When the schoolmaster had left the cottage with Morvenna entrusted to his care—on the understanding that he would bring her back before sunset, without fail—Malva (who was washing up the dishes) remarked cautiously to Ezekiel, “Well, faather, what’ee think of it?”

“Dunnaw, I’m sure; dunnaw what to say,” replied Ezekiel ruminantly; pacing heavily up and down the clean-sanded kitchen, and occasionally, with an air of perplexity, running his fingers slowly through his thick grey beard. “Anyhow, I raather like the looks an’ the ways of un. He do sim to me a honest, trustworthy sort o’ man.”

“Iss; he’s all that, b’leeve,” rejoined Malva.

“He’s a bit quiet, esn’a? But he’s owld enough to know his own mind, anyhow.”

Quoth Malva, watching her husband out of the corners of her eyes, “It do look as ef he got a mind to Morvenna, don’t it?”

“Time’ll shaw . . . time’ll shaw. She’s onnly a cheeld yet, come to that,” replied Ezekiel. “Ef the thought esn’ theer, I wedn’ put it in her head.”

“‘Tese theer right ’nuff! no doubt ’bout that,” rejoined Malva, nodding at him emphatically. “Ef he have—what’ee say? He’s all right, ef they do ’gree on it together: dont’ee think so?”

“‘Tese no use hopin’ nor plannin’ nawthin’,” remarked Ezekiel, twisting his beard in his fingers.

“Well, but wan caan’t help their thoughts,” retorted Malva.

“No: wish they cud! . . . But theer! what es to be, will be, s’pose!”

And Ezekiel paced up and down and to and fro in the little kitchen, perplexedly twisting and untwisting his beard, and occasionally emitting a long breath that was suspiciously like a sigh.

“Come, faather! Now, faather!” remonstrated Malva gently.

"Iss, I knaw. I'll go out 'pon bayche for a pipe, b'leeve, mawther."

And reaching down his hat from the peg behind the door, Ezekiel wandered out again to the sea-front: like a sick animal, desiring now always to be alone.

CHAPTER VIII

A COUNTRY WOOING

THE show of new finery in the parish on this particular "feasten Sunday," was pronounced by competent observers to be one of the "grandest" of recent years.

The farmers' daughters, as a whole, perhaps carried off the prize; at least for colour and richness of material. But it was generally admitted that among the daughters of the peasants and coast-folk there was not one whose outfit, for showiness and emphasised expensiveness, could compare with that of Drusilla Trevaskis.

Great indeed was the envy of the girls of her acquaintance as Drusilla strolled to and fro in her gorgeous finery, with Joe Rosevear not merely walking at her side, but actually (significant action) "arm in crook" with her!

Joe had not intended publicly to have committed himself to this extent—though he might have done it after sundown in the quiet of the lanes. But Drusilla's finery was so irresistible in its showy superiority that his vanity was flattered to an extent that made him just a little rash.

The air was full of sweethearting: of girls parading before the youngsters with provocative glances and shining eyes, and of youngsters as tinglingly full of life as these. Everywhere there was the restlessness of pursuit, of acquisition, and of the hundred other phases and lights and shades of pairing-time. And in the excitement of having acquired the "pick of the girls" for his shiner, Joe had forgotten his usual caution, and actually had offered her his arm!

Drusilla, of course, had "jumped at" the offer in an instant: it was something beyond her expectations, though she frankly acknowledged that she deserved it. And during the remainder of the day she took every possible opportunity of making her proprietorship patent to the world: being determined that Joe should find it difficult to disavow it and discard her, if he should presently grow nervous and feel inclined to draw back.

She found out, however, the truth of the old saying, that you may lead a horse to the water but you can't make him drink.

She had Joe to herself in the evening in the twilight of the lanes, and she let him kiss her to his heart's content: but—make him "propose" to her she couldn't.

He was willing to *act* the lover to the full extent of his temperament—his range of love-talk being almost as narrow as that of a jackdaw—but he was as wary of approaching marriage as a rat of approaching a trap.

In vain Drusilla threw out hints as open and seductive as she dared venture on; even in the quiet of the lanes, with his arm around her and her lips free to him, Joe was able to elude the pitfalls and to hold himself unpledged.

At last, in sheer desperation, as they were walking homeward in the moonlight, Drusilla frankly put the question to him, "Why not we two make a match of it, same as awthers—what do'ee say, Joe?"

"Caan't afford it—tha's a fact!" replied Joe, cornered in spite of himself. "No good thinkin' o' things like that, with not a penny in me pocket." And he repeated emphatically, looking her straight in the face as he said it, "I don't arn enough for two: a wife's a luxury I caan't afford."

"Ef tha's the onnly thing tha's stoppin'ee . . ."

"Esn' it stop enough—*that*?"

"Ef I got father to furnish for us, and give us a pound or two to start with?"

"A pound or two! what good wed that be?" said Joe.

"Well, furnish for us and give us, say, ten pounds to start

with? Would'ee do it then?" asked Drusilla, bringing her face as close as she dared to his.

"Darn it! iss, I wed—there!" cried Joe, in desperation.

"Then we'll do it, Joe!" she cried eagerly, tightening his arm within her own.

"What nonsense thee'rt talkin'! Do it—how?" demanded Joe. "Thy faather cudn' furnish for'ee an' giv'ee ten pounds ovver: thee might as well ax un, right away, to give'ee a slice off the moon!"

"Iss he can! Iss he can!" cried Drusilla excitedly. "You don't knaw everything, Joe—you dear old love! We're better off than some of the folks do think us, I can tell'ee! We arn't quite so poor as we do seem," she insisted mysteriously.

"Eh? Faather got a bit o' money by un, have 'a, you?" queried Joe, now alert and hungry for revelations.

"Iss: more than a bit. Else how did I git this rig-out? It cost a putty penny, too!"

"Iss, so I shud say!" replied Joe emphatically. "Five pounds dedn' pay for it?" he queried, watching her intently.

"No! five pounds dedn'!" she repeated in triumph.

"Well, I ha'n't no objection: ef thee can manage it as thee say. Ef he'll furnish, an' give us ten pounds to start on—I'll do it!"

"Thee waan't go back on thy word, Joe?"

"No: ef thee keep to thine! Furnish, an' ten pounds to start weth—an' I'll marr-ry'ee when thee like!"

"Right you are! Then tha's settled! I'll arrange it weth father," cried Drusilla eagerly. "I'll see'ee tormorra, Joe, an' tell'ee what he do say."

"I'd raather see un meself," replied Joe suspiciously.

"I'll see un first. *Thee* shall see un afterwards—or see mother, 'tes all the same."

"Well, we'll layve it at that, for the present," answered Joe. "But mind! 'tesn no promise, ef he do back-out on his part!"

"Of course: I understand. But that'll be all right. He waan't back-out, I'm sure."

"We shall see," replied Joe, with a notable lack of enthusiasm.

And Drusilla added, nestling up to him, "Iss, thee'll see!"

. . . While Drusilla was engaged, with absorbing intentness, in tracking Joe's heart to its final lair in his pocket, she was being much discussed among her female acquaintances. But more because she had suddenly blossomed out into such finery than because she had captured "Li'l Joe Murfles,"¹ as her shiner was disparagingly nicknamed by the youngsters.

Where the money had come from for her finery, was the puzzle to most of the gossips: and it was this phase of the women's chatter that presently caught the attention of Tom the Hangman, who always made it a rule to keep his ears wide open when he was anywhere in the neighbourhood of a group of gossiping females.

"Her faather's a crabber, esn'a, down to Polurrian cove? P'raps he've had a' extra good sayson?" suggested Tom inquiringly.

"Not better than awthers: an' not so good as some. Isaac Roscorla have done a bra' bit better than he have. An' Isaac cudn' give Keziah such a rig-out to save his life."

"How do'ee know that?" queried Tom insinuatingly.

"'Cause Keziah, his wife, do happen to be my sester!" replied the woman aggressively, turning her big red face now full towards the pedlar.

"No offence! no offence! warn't aware you was sesters. P'raps Ezekiel have falled in weth a bit o' somethin' good at say? The *Gannet*, now . . ."

But the woman had again turned her back; and the group began to drift away from him, moving slowly along the road.

The awkward little creature sidled quietly after them: like a lumbering crab creeping towards a drowned body stealthily—ready to stop and reconnoitre at the slightest obstacle, but, all the same, stubbornly determined to advance.

¹ Little Joe freckles.

CHAPTER IX

SUNSHINE AND GOSSAMER

WHEN Morvenna came down the valley with the school master at sunset, she seemed to bring back to the little group of crabbers' cottages something of the charm of youth and the trembling dazzle of its hopes—echoes of romance, a touch of glamour, the wonder and magic of the dawn. Her slim, girlishly pretty figure and her face rosy with happy blushes, seemed in harmony with the jubilant rapture of the skylarks, that were still singing high above the great stony hills, and made even the plaining moan of the tide on the sea-front lose something of its note of dreary hopelessness.

The three or four ageing women, standing at their cottage doors, who chanced to see her with her face smiling up at the schoolmaster, seemed suddenly to remember their own vanished girlhood and the hopes and promises that made it so wonderful and so foolishly happy, all in a breath. And, as they glanced significantly at one another, they were aware vaguely—for a fleeting moment—of a sudden sweetening of the springs within them, the springs of the secret inner life.

Down here, at the edge of the ever-moaning sea, life had in it a note of mournfulness, even at the best of times, and the dwellers in the little cottages were by no means a mirthful folk. Farther up the valley, it is true, there was a sprinkling of young wives, who might be seen with tiny children clinging to their skirts, or with a round-eyed baby laughing and cooing in their arms; their own faces being full of the content their time of life ministered to, and all of them (it was very evident) making the most of their opportunities. But here, at the mouth of the cove, where the only dwellings were the five little cottages of the crabbers, the householders were all middle-aged or

elderly folk. There were no young children to play around the doors of the cottages, or to toddle beside the women and make the eyes of these brighten; nor a single young wife with the new expectancy in her face. Here was simply the greyness of defeat, or of a life monotonously unhoping; a quiet that, unhappily, was not born of victory, and a quiescence that (as certainly) was not that of mere content.

Accordingly the advent of "little Morvenna" (she was by far the youngest girl in the group of cottages) bringing with her "airs" from the delightful world of sweethearting, was a frank pleasure to every one—except, perhaps, to the crabbers' sons; of whom one or two already had cast wistful eyes on her, though evidently without winning the recognition they desired.

There would have been many jealous glances levelled at the schoolmaster if the young bachelors of the row had been in the cove this evening when he brought Morvenna home with her hands full of flowers. Owing, however, to it being "feasten Sunday," the young men, at present, were all up at Choone, watching the girls and enjoying the show and the fun generally.

So when the schoolmaster presently (after a few minutes' chat with Malva and Ezekiel) left the crabber's cottage and turned up the valley, there were no jealous young eyes to note how Morvenna kept peeping through her bedroom-window watching the tall, upright form of her companion as he skirted the little stream, crossed the stepping-stones lightly, and walked lingeringly towards the straggling hedge of thorn-bushes, behind which he would finally disappear from sight.

Before, however, he passed behind the screen of blossoming hawthorn—of which a sprig was at this moment in Morvenna's bodice, rising and falling with the rapid rise and fall of her bosom—the schoolmaster turned, and Morvenna saw him fix his eyes on her window.

She drew back into the shadow of the room in an instant, though the attempt at hiding herself was unnecessary under

the circumstances, as the schoolmaster (at that distance) would have been unable to discern her, even if her face had been pressed against the panes.

He watched the window for a minute or two, and Morvenna, in return, watched him "with all her eyes"—her bosom throbbing tumultuously and her cheeks full of flaming colour—and then (and, she fancied, with lingering reluctance) he turned away slowly, and she lost sight of him behind the hedge.

"Watchin' un from the winda, I'll be bound," remarked Malva sympathetically.

"Ay, maybe: as like as not," said Ezekiel. "Onnly hope the cheeld waan't set her heart on un too strongly. I wedn' have her hurt in mind, or disappointed, on no account."

"Nayther wed I, o' coorse not! what mawther wed? She's the li'l piggy-widden,¹ God bless her!" exclaimed Malva. And then she added, less emotionally, "But theer! I faancy tha's all right."

"Dunnaw 'bout that," rejoined Ezekiel gloomily. "Life's full o' disappointments: nawthin' else, sim to me."

"Hush! theer she es comin'!"

And with that the matter dropped.

Later in the evening, long after the candle had been lighted, Drusilla came in, hot and excited.

"Well, I got news for'ee at last!" she cried exultantly.

"Axed'ee, have 'a?" asked Malva.

"Oh! has he, Drusilla?"

And Morvenna looked up from her reading with her eyes shining eagerly.

"Iss! tha's 'bout the size of it, b'leeve!" replied Drusilla, throwing herself into a chair with the air of one taking her triumph coolly.

"What did he say, Drusilla?" exclaimed Morvenna, with keen interest.

"What did the schoolmaster say to *thee* in the lane this

¹ Li'l piggy-widden = little white pig: a term of endearment for the last-born in a family.

evenin' ? Was it 'Lovey-dovey, give me a kiss' ? or, what was it ?"

"For shame, Drusilla !" cried Morvenna, the prompt colour flooding her cheeks.

"Well, don't ask what awther folks say, when they're courtin' !"

"Le' the cheeld alone !" cried Ezekiel sternly.

"How ded'ee manage to bring un to the point ?" queried Malva.

"Manage, indeed ! There was no management needed, that I knaw of. He was onnly too glad to git the chaance, b'leeve."

"Come ! that waan't do, Drusilla !" remarked her mother. "That esn' like Joe. Thee knaw that as well as I do. Else why have 'a ben howldin' off an' plaguin'ee so long ?"

"Shy — like the schoolmaster, s'pose," retorted Drusilla. Then, dropping her flippant tone, she added, with a touch of embarrassment, "There's onnly wan hitch to our gittin' marr-ried right off . . ."

"So theer *es* a hitch, then ?" rejoined Malva, nodding her head.

"Well . . . a hitch after a fashion. But nawthin' that caan't be got ovver."

"Well, le's hear what the hitch es," said Malva.

"Will'ee do me a good turn, Morvenna ?" remarked Drusilla, suddenly turning and addressing her sister.

"If I can, Drusilla."

"Well, thee *can*, right 'nuff ; if thee got a mind to."

"What is it you want me to do ?" questioned Morvenna.

"Well, Joe ha'n't got the money to furnish ; tha's the truth of it," replied Drusilla, addressing the little group as a whole. "He's willin' to be marr-ried next week, for the matter o' that."

"Oh ! he es, es'a ?" remarked Malva, eyeing her closely.

"If we can furnish between us," continued Drusilla, "all will go swimmingly. I got thirteen pounds meself . . . if Morvenna would give me her twenty . . . and father, say, add five or six pounds to it . . ."

"I haven't taken the money, as you know, Drusilla. And I'm not going to take it," remarked Morvenna. "If father is willing to give you the share he intended for me, I shan't raise any objections, that's certain."

"Do'ee mind, father?" asked Drusilla, now addressing Ezekiel, who up to the present had remained seated in his chair in silence.

"Ask thy mawther. Whatever she do say, I shall 'gree to. Wish the money was at the bottom o' the say, for *my* part! As it esn', I don't keer what do become of it. But I don't want to hear none o' your plannin' and plottin'. Settle it weth your mawther: I'm off for a pipe out 'pon bayche."

And with that Ezekiel rose and put on his hat, and, without another word, went out of the house.

Accordingly, after a little further talk, the matter was settled on the lines Drusilla had indicated.

The twenty pounds that would have been Morvenna's, and an additional five pounds out of the sum apportioned to Malva, were handed over to Drusilla, or, rather, Drusilla was allowed to take the money from the tea-caddy—Malva, like her husband and Morvenna, having a horror of even touching the coins—and, with the thirty-eight sovereigns thus securely in her possession, Drusilla felt that she had Joe, so to speak, in her hand.

But when she began to discuss sundry matters her mind was brimming over with, Malva stopped her abruptly and with something like temper. "Plenty o' time for that! thee arn't to be marr-ried to-night. It'll ha' to keep 'tell to-morra, anyhow," she remarked, thrusting the subject aside. "'Tes 'most bed-time, now, b'leeve. Go an' call in thy faather, Morvenna."

Morvenna slipped on her hat and ran out to the sea-front.

Ezekiel was pacing up and down on the ridge of shingle in the moonlight, his head sunk on his breast and his hands deep in his trousers' pockets: but of a pipe in his mouth there was no sign.

"Come, father!" said Morvenna. "Mother sent me to fetch you. You won't be worried any more to-night, father: we're all going to bed."

"Right, me dear," replied Ezekiel. And he obediently followed her indoors.

CHAPTER X

LOVERS AND A LISTENER

WHEN Drusilla, the next day, gleefully informed Joe that everything was arranged, he remarked (somewhat suspiciously) that he had better go down with her to the cove and see her mother, so that there might be no mistake or hitch in the understanding. "Don't want to be made a fool of," he added ungraciously.

Drusilla, however, had prepared herself for this emergency. In order to soothe her vanity, she had tried to win the game gracefully, without the humiliation of having to prove her words to her sweetheart. But if this were not to be—and she had half doubted it from the first—she was not going to be beaten for lack of having her proofs at hand.

"I got the money in my pocket now: I brought it on purpose to shaw'ee," she remarked, with a smile that evidently was somewhat forced.

They were now traversing the ferny "bottom" (as it is called) that lies at the head of Polurrian valley—the cottage, where Joe lived with his married sister, standing at the edge of the "bottom," not far from the highway. As there was no one in sight, and nothing visible among the furze-clumps or huge brakes of fern except a few cows and a sprinkling of sheep, Joe remarked, still suspiciously, "Well, le's see the money, as thee got it weth'ee: may as well."

"Right: le's sit down, and I'll take it out and shaw'ee."

They accordingly seated themselves at the foot of an

ancient barrow, now luxuriantly overgrown with ferns,¹ and Drusilla, making a table of her lap for the occasion, took out the sovereigns and spread them out for Joe to stare at.

"Count them!" said he, eyeing the glittering display greedily.

Drusilla obediently began to count them.

Lifting each coin lingeringly, and telling the number of them with equal slowness, she made the tale of thirty-eight as impressive as she possibly could.

"Iss: they're all right, b'leeve," remarked Joe.

"All right? O' coorse they are! Gowld every wan o' them!"

Drusilla excitedly flung the skirt of her dress over the coins to hide them, oblivious of the sudden display of her petticoats, and Joe jumped to his feet hastily, as if detected in a crime.

It was the crafty little pedlar who had stolen on them unaware. Peering over the clump of ferns at Drusilla's back, he had watched, from beginning to end, the display and counting of the coins, listening greedily for a possible explanation of their presence.

"Quite a li'l fortune for a courtin' couple, that!" cackled Tom, glancing warily from one to the other.

"We ben long enough savin' it up, anyhow," remarked Drusilla. "Haven' us, Joe? Though *thee* put the best part, 'tes true."

Thus appealed to and flattered on the susceptible side of his vanity, Joe's eyes lost their glimmer of restless anxiety. Thrusting his hands in his trousers' pockets and swelling

¹ The locality which I have here called Choone bottoms, is only a short distance from Bolleit (whose name is said to mean 'the Field of Blood'), where, in 936, Howel, the last king of Cornwall, was decisively defeated by Athelstan, the Saxon. Two huge monoliths of unhewn granite, a circle of standing stones, and several large tumuli (the latter, on my last visit to them, almost impenetrably overgrown with ferns and brambles) will be found in the neighbourhood of this ancient battlefield.

out his waistcoat, he remarked carelessly, glancing at the pedlar the while, "Iss, it have took me time, but I don't begrudge it. A man's willin' to do his best when he's goin' to be marr-ried—ef he's a *man*!" And with that he fronted the pedlar with a swaggering air that was almost grand.

The pedlar mistrusted the words, somehow: but, all the same, he was taken aback.

"Come, Drusilla!" said Joe loftily, "we don't want no geekin' boobas¹ followin' us like adders! An', wha's more—we *waan't have it*!" And the little man tried to look as fierce as he could, though his eyes, all the time, belied the bravery of his words.

"Aw, iss, o' coorse. No offence meant, I'm sure. An' I hope none's took," remarked the pedlar, watching them both. "I was passin' by an' heerd somewan countin' out suvrins, an' I just geeked ovver at'ee, cureyus like, you. No offence," he added hesitatingly; taken aback by the boldness of Drusilla's unexpected move. What more likely than that the carter and Drusilla together *had* been saving up, secretly, for the marriage they were hungering after? Though, even then, it was certainly a "mint o' money" for a crabber's daughter and a mere underpaid carter to be counting out privately here among the ferns. But there!... he began to scratch his head ruminantly: still eyeing them with close and vigilant regard. "Hope no offence?" he repeated again, warily.

"Go thy ways, wust 'a! an' we'll go ours."

"And the next time you come geekin'," added Drusilla viciously, "I hope somewan'll give'ee somethin' you waan't forgit in a hurry, you ugly, troll-footed little toad, you!"

"Ay, me dear, a putty li'l fightin'-cock *you* be! Wish thy husband (that es to be) joy of 'ee, I'm sure! Onnly hope he'll git it—but I don't think he will!"

And with this parting shot, Tom the Hangman turned his back on them, and, sinking his head between his shoulders, hobbled away among the ferns.

"We done un fust rate—dedn' us?" cried Joe glee-

¹ Prying fools.

fully. "Thee'rt a smart wan weth thy tongue, no mistake, Drusilla!" And then he added, watching her anxiously, "We must stick to it now, 'bout it bein' our savin's—mine an' yours."

"Iss, o' course we will," replied Drusilla, complacently. "The money will belong to both of us when we are marr-ried: and it waan't matter a pin if 'tes all of it called thine. I don't mind, for my part. It'll all be joint and wan between us. When a woman do give her awn self to a man," and she looked at him with a glittering eagerness in her eyes, "she esn' likely to mind givin' him her pocket into the bargain."

"Tha's right, Drusilla!" cried Joe, with animation. "Very good sense in that, me dear!" And, for the first time in their courtship, he kissed her hot cheeks and lips with something of the hungry mastery that Drusilla had always been eager to evoke.

Drusilla paid him back his kisses with interest. This was a game she could play at till he was tired.

"We'll be marr-ried as soon as thee like, me dear! caan't be too soon for me! Shall us put-in the banns on Sunday?" said Joe, at last on fire.

"Iss, I'm willin', if thee want to."

"Then, so it shall be!" said Joe. "We'll go up an' see the passon together to-night, shall us?"

"Iss, I'm willin'," said Drusilla; her cheeks full of splendid colour and her eyes glowing back at his.

"Tha's settled, then!" cried Joe. And then he added, "Darn it all! why shudn' us go up to wance, an' git it over on the spot? Will'ee? Shall us, you?"

"Iss," replied Drusilla, with equal eagerness.

So up to the parson's they went together, arm-in-arm and all aglow.

CHAPTER XI

PREPARING FOR THE WEDDING

For the next few weeks, Drusilla was as busy as she could well be. So full were her hands, in fact, that Malva and Morvenna were drawn also into the net of her activities, and had to assist, early and late, in cutting, sewing, choosing, planning, and generally preparing for the wedding and the new home that was in prospect.

Joe had managed to secure a tiny four-roomed cottage standing at the edge of Choone bottoms—about a furlong, or so, distant from the dwelling of his married sister, and by so much nearer the mill where he worked. As soon as she began to get together the furniture, Drusilla was constantly to and fro between the bottoms and the cove, as Joe slept in the cottage to look after the things there, and she was thus able to “place” the furniture piece by piece as she purchased it.

Drusilla’s bustling activity reacted so uncomfortably on the life and arrangements of the cottage—what with the meals disorganised by her jaunts here and there, the house littered in every direction by sewing-work and odds and ends, and lumbered up with new bedding, new pieces of furniture, new utensils—that Ezekiel kept out of it as much as he could.

He loathed the sight of the things purchased with that hated money, and he felt bitterly, gallingly ashamed of himself sitting there like a thief among stolen goods; with Morvenna’s pure young eyes on him, full of love, as he was aware, but full also of the pity that had only crept into them since she had judged him.

He was deadly sick at heart at the business from beginning to end, and found the interior of the cottage at present as hateful to him as if the dead man (of whom he had

again begun to dream) sat there in the chimney-corner staring and grinning at him all the time.

Happily, the warm, light evenings made it possible to remain out of doors almost up to bed-time, and Ezekiel with his pipe in his mouth—half the time unlighted—would pace to and fro, and to and fro again, with wearying monotony, till the other dwellers in the row almost began to be scared at him; half thinking he must be haunted, or else must be going mad.

Even when he was compelled to come indoors, according to Drusilla he was “as cross as a bear with a sore head,” he was “as sour as a Whig,” “as black as the Turk,” “as teasy as a gull:” she seemed to find her store of complaints against him almost inexhaustible.

Certainly, at present, he was by no means a pleasant companion for a young woman elatedly approaching her marriage, and feeling the blood in her veins a-bubble all the time. His moody silence, his gloom, the veiled *something* in his countenance, were all eminently unwelcome in the narrow interior where elbow constantly jogged against elbow, and eye looked into eye for lack of anywhere else to look. Abnormally full of vitality as Drusilla was at present, she found the repression of her father's presence frankly unendurable, and she was only too glad to get him out of the way and pack him off to bed at the earliest moment he would go.

It cut Morvenna to the heart to watch her father at this time: he looked so helpless in his depression, and so hopelessly dejected. But she was powerless to do anything to lessen his discomfort. She could only long, like himself, for the quiet days that were to come, when the bustle of the wedding (happily) would be over, and the things he hated (she was sure) because of their birth-cost, would no longer be flaunted before his eyes every moment he was in the house.

To Drusilla, on the contrary, the weeks were the happiest she hitherto had known. She was delighted to be in the midst of such a clack of tongues and buzz of activity, and to

be the theme of such vivacious gossip—the most exhilarating she had ever tasted. Her pulse danced with animation all day long, and her brain was so alive with anticipation—so full of planning and choosing and bustle—that she could scarcely sleep at nights, and often when in bed kept Morvenna awake for hours.

The gossip around her, as a whole, was remarkably friendly and good-humoured: a little sly at times, and occasionally spiced with jealousy—a spice whose flavour Drusilla found piquant and enjoyed hugely—and only at intervals a little spiteful, when she “showed her teeth” with fine effect: the blood, that fed her feminine passions so bountifully, here feeding her courage almost to the height of audacity.

Nothing spoiled Drusilla’s delighted anticipation of her marriage. A husband she had long wanted, and a husband she was about to have. And she felt certain that any possible wound to her vanity—and occasionally the gossips made her aware, with blunt directness, that she was not going to marry a paragon either of good looks or of generosity—would be far more than compensated for by the felicity that awaited her.

Of the three ceremonies in which the community lays its hand on the individual—his *christening*, at the beginning of his life; his *marriage*, at his maturity; and, at the end, that abandonment and casting out called his *burial*—there is only one in which he is known to take a keen personal interest: an interest always alert to the point of curiosity; occasionally, even acute to the pitch and gravity of passion. At his *christening* he is a mere symbol, a bundle of potencies—little more; and though he be nominally the very heart and centre of the ceremony, he is lying still at the door of consciousness—neither asleep, nor fully awake. At his *burial*, he has nothing to rejoice at; and if he mourn for it, who is there heeds? But at his *marriage* the man is active, he is fully alive and can voice his wishes: he is here taking boldly that for which he has hungered, and of whose bestowal he is presumed to be reasonably glad. And *this* ceremony, for good or for evil, he will remember to the end of his days.

Naturally indifferent as to her christening, of which she had no memory; and scared even to think of the tragedy of her burial; Drusilla was determined to make her marriage worthy of the hopes that clustered around it. The longstone¹ that she would set up for remembrance on *this* occasion, should be one worthy of the ceremony, and a landmark for all her life.

To this end, Drusilla spared no personal effort, and, as far as her means went, no possible expense. She rose early; she went to bed late; she was constantly running here and there, making purchases, completing arrangements, smoothing the path for her future generally; in fact, her activities were at their maximum and she was unweariedly full of life.

Morvenna, of course, was to be her bride's-maid, and Ezekiel was to give her away; her mother would be there, and so would Mrs. Roscorla, and probably also Joe's married sister—in fact, half Polurrian would be present at the ceremony. It would be her hour of triumph and utmost splendour: and she meant to enjoy it to the full. And in the excitement of preparing for this great day of days, Drusilla swept everything and every one remorselessly along with her; as oblivious of their wishes, or the possible inconvenience to them, as if they were merely tools that she might take up, or cast down, without a thought.

As a consequence, the schoolmaster (during these fussy, bustling weeks) saw little of Morvenna except during school-hours; and found the sudden change by no means a pleasant one.

He endeavoured, once or twice, to get her to take a walk with him, but on each occasion Drusilla had previously trapped her by a promise, and Morvenna, most reluctantly, was obliged to refuse him; her eyes tremblingly full of regret, and her voice troubled quite as noticeably.

"Indeed I can't help it, Mr. Richards!" she protested tremulously. "I promised Drusilla: and I don't like to ask

¹ In Cornwall, the uninscribed monoliths found on the moors are generally called by the peasants "longstones."

her to let me off. They're all so busy at home, just at present!" she added pleadingly.

"Well, it's turning my hair grey! missing my walk with you, like this. And I used to look forward to it so much!" remarked the schoolmaster, with plaintive playfulness.

"So did I!" answered Morvenna, her voice sinking sympathetically.

"Then why not come out this evening? It will do you a world of good! You look as though you want a long walk badly." Which she did.

"Oh, I can't! I really can't!"

"You're a naughty little girl! I almost think I ought to be cross with you." But on looking into Morvenna's eyes, which he had evaded for a second or two, he perceived that they were genuinely distressed and full of troubled disappointment; and he dropped his playful insistence with an abruptness that half startled her. "No, no, Morvenna! I didn't mean it, I assure you! I couldn't be cross with you, if I tried. Forgive me, there's a good girl!"

"Yes . . . but, then . . . you said it as if you meant it *really!*" protested Morvenna: a suspicious trembling in her voice, though her lips tried to smile. And, as she lifted her eyes to his, he was aware of a grieved trouble in them that he was frankly sorry to have evoked.

"I'm too selfish: that's what's the matter with me," said the schoolmaster.

"Oh no! indeed, you're not, Mr. Richards!"

"Yes, I am!" insisted the schoolmaster. "I ought to be caned like a troublesome boy."

The suggestion was so comical to her imagination, that Morvenna smiled irresistibly.

"That's right! I'm glad to see you laughing again, Morvenna. You have been so good to me that I owe you thanks instead of teasing you as I have done. And tease you again I won't! It was too bad of me: that's a fact. When is this terrible wedding to be? Next Tuesday, isn't it?"

"Yes," replied Morvenna.

"Nearly six days more, then, before you will be free

Well, I must wait as patiently as I can, I suppose. But, afterwards, you'll be kinder to your old friend, won't you? You won't neglect me as you have done?"

"No," answered Morvenna.

"Good afternoon to'ee, sir!" It was Tom the Hangman limping past them.

"Good afternoon," said the schoolmaster, returning the greeting indifferently. And he added to Morvenna, when the pedlar was well out of earshot, "Who is that man? I don't like his look, somehow."

While Morvenna was explaining who he was, Tom the Hangman was limping down to the sea-front, where he presently espied Ezekiel tarring his punt on the ridge of shingle.

"Good afternoon, Mester Trevaskis!" cried Tom. "Thee'rt a lucky man—all'ys in luck's way, simminly."

"Afternoon, Tom," replied Ezekiel, but without any particular heartiness.

"Ay, thee'rt a lucky man, as I was sayin'," repeated Tom.

"Lucky? How so?" quoth Ezekiel gloomily.

"Well, what else do'ee call it, as the world do wag now-a-days? Wan daughter goin' to be marr-ried right off; an' the awther makin' up to schoolmaster like a good wan."

Ezekiel looked up quickly, with a glance whose sudden wrath the pedlar visibly quailed at.

"Wipe thy dirty paws on thy awn coat, man! Ef thee lay them on mine, I'll tar an' feather'ee from top to toe!"

"No offence! no offence! 'tes onnly my way," remarked the pedlar, edging aside from Ezekiel. "I'm a plain, blunt man: an' plain an' blunt es me way o' spaikin'."

"Well, keep thy 'plain bluntness' for awther folk's affairs. Ef thee begin to meddle weth mine, I'll ram this tar-brush down thy throt!"

And Ezekiel gave the tar-brush a sudden dexterous twirl that sent its contents spattering in every direction; some falling so perilously close to Tom that the latter hobbled farther off as fast as his legs could carry him.

But Tom persisted—now from a safe distance, however—“I was only goin’ to congratulate ’ee, Mester Trevaskis, on such a steady, savin’ son-in-law as Joe. Thirty-eight pounds he an’ Drusilla have saved between them, so they towld me.”

Ezekiel’s eyes sought Tom’s with the alarmed swiftness of fear: the man’s whole face changing its hue and expression. But as Ezekiel had lifted the tar-brush in raising his head, Tom’s eyes had leaped nervously to the brush to watch its movements, and in this moment of shifting interest the significance of the glance escaped him.

When Tom’s eyes tried to meet and grapple with Ezekiel’s, they were aware of a peculiar expression melting out of the crabber’s face, but could get no closer than this to the breath of fear that had passed over it.

Ezekiel had controlled himself by an effort that had blanched his lips under his moustache and had made his fingers tighten on the tar-brush with the clutch of one drowning: but, with the exception of these suppressed manifestations, he gave no other sign of the sudden terror that had stabbed him. And neither the hue of Ezekiel’s lips, nor the clutch of his fingers, came under the pedlar’s observation, prying though the latter was.

Ezekiel dropped his head and resumed his tarring without taking any verbal notice of Tom’s remark; though the latter had startled and alarmed him for a half-a-dozen different reasons. Drusilla’s lie, the strange idea that she should tell it to the pedlar, the thought that Tom was suspiciously “smelling round” the subject, Joe’s share in the lie and his reasons for sharing in it, the wonder as to how much Drusilla might have told her sweetheart and how far the news of the money might have travelled in consequence; all these were questions that agitated Ezekiel to the roots of his nature; unsettling him to the pitch of a disquiet that was almost torturing.

But he remained silent: and went on with his tarring as before.

The pedlar, however, was craftily persistent; following

like a sleuth-hound, certain ideas of his own. "Done well for a mere carter, ha'n't 'a, you? For, o' coorse, the maid herself cudn' ha' saved up much? *Ef* he'd ben a crabber, now, I cud ha' onderstood it." He waited for a second or two: but Ezekiel went on with his tarring without remark. "Crabbers, now, arn't like men on a day-wage; they can make money in more ways than wan, can crabbers."

"What do *thee* know about crabbers?" quoth Ezekiel, without, however, turning his head.

"I can see a bra' bit from cleffs, 'pon times."

He paused again.

But Ezekiel remained silent.

"Crabbers do come across queer fish at times, by all accounts. Fishes with bilts on them, b'leeve: an' such-like."

Ezekiel's heart stood still. His extremities went cold: and he felt as if his limbs would give way under him. But the man's dogged will was stronger than his nerves. Pressing the tar-brush against the punt, he leaned heavily on its handle, and, in this way, partially disguised and tided over the physical shock that had shaken the strength out of him. The mental smart had gone deeper—it was like that of a sword-thrust. But, as to this, he knew well that he could trust himself to hold his peace. Suddenly, however, the supreme need of self-preservation flooded the channels of his nature like a rushing angry tide, sweeping all other thoughts before it like sea-wrack. With a quick lifting of the head, Ezekiel flung out the question: "Heerd of any such strange fish lately, have'ee? *Ef* so . . ."

"How about the bodies from the *Gannet*?"

"Iss, how about them?" Ezekiel's voice deepened menacingly. "Do'ee mayne to accuse we men in this cove . . ." and he advanced towards the pedlar with the tar-brush lifted threateningly.

"I see'd a man . . . see'd un weth me very awn eyes . . ."

"See'd un *what*? What are'ee drivin' at, man?"

"I was up 'pon cleffs an' I see'd un robbin' a dead body."

"Where?"

"Out theer! Out in the bay, o' coorse!"

"Who was the man? Tell me his name!" demanded Ezekiel. "Ef he do live in this cove, as sure as I'm alive," the crabber asseverated with strange solemnity, "I'll see that he do go in to Penzaance clink¹ to-night: ayven ef all in the cove got to bind un hand an' foot to car' un there!" (In his heart, he said to himself with bitter determination—the deadly, almost brutal, desperation of despair—"Ef he do say 'tes *me*, I'll go an' give meself up to wance. I caan't live weth this hangin' ovver me head.") "His name, man!" he demanded, with grim insistence.

"Who said he lived in this cove?" snarled the pedlar.

"His name, man! His name!" Ezekiel thundered at him fiercely.

"Well, find it out for theeself—ef thee want to knaw it."

Ezekiel contemptuously turned his back on him.

"I tell'ee, I see'd un!" insisted the pedlar.

Ezekiel resumed the interrupted tarring of the punt, without taking any further notice of the remark.

"I see'd un, weth me very awn eyes, out theer!"

"If thee don't git out o' this putty sharp, we'll tar an' feather'ee an' ride'ee up to Choone on a couple o' oars!" growled Ezekiel, with the savage note again in his voice. "Best take theeself off while thee got the chaance, man!"

For a minute or two, the pedlar eyed Ezekiel's back in silence; then, setting his lips into a look of ugly determination, he turned and hobbled off, his lame foot crunching the shingle heavily.

"Black as this boat me heart must be, s'pose," thought Ezekiel grimly, as he heard the shingle grating harshly and slipping under the awkward tread. "But still, there *es* anawther man like me—I arn't alone like Judas, poor lost saul!" And Ezekiel's heart swelled with an unspeakable feeling of relief: a strange sense of sombre exulta-

¹ Lock-up, or prison.

tion at the comradeship. "I shud like to know un, poor fella! ayven ef he was to hate me." And as he mused wistfully on the future ahead of him—a future drearily full of gloom and perplexity—Ezekiel kept muttering over and over to himself, "Onnly wish I *cud* know un—that awther man!"

CHAPTER XII

SPRING

EZEKIEL felt too nervously unstrung that evening to raise with Drusilla the question as to what she had told the pedlar, and why she had said anything to him on the subject. He asked his wife, instead, to find out just what had happened, and also how much, or how little, Drusilla might have said to Joe.

When Malva, the next morning, before Drusilla was downstairs, gave him an account of the scene in Choone bottoms, and told him why Drusilla (on the spur of the moment) had decided to tell the lie, Ezekiel remarked, with hopeless despondency, "There! it have begunned to ruin *her* life, too! 'Tes wuss than poison, mawther, that money."

"I'm afeerd 'tes, faather," Malva said, helplessly. "I wedn' say nawthin' to her about it, ef I was thee," she added anxiously. "Talkin' waan't undo wha's done. An' I don't want no upset so close to the weddin'."

"All right, mawther: lev' it be as it es. I ought to ha' counted the cost 'fore I done it. Ef I onnly knawed then so much as I know now!"

"Ah, *ef* es a crooked letter, faather!"¹

"Iss, an' mine es a crooked life."

"Don't, faather! I caan't beer to hear'ee talk like this."

¹ A local pun, based on the identity in sound, in Cornish peasant speech, between the pronunciation of "if" and F.

"'Tis feelin' like it, *I* caan't beer," muttered Ezekiel.

"Thee'rt gittin' whishter every day in thy ways," sighed Malva.

"There! I waan't say no more. Lev' it go." And Ezekiel went out on the beach for a look round before breakfast.

After the talk with her mother, Drusilla was half ashamed, half afraid, to face her father.

Malva, as well as Morvenna, had reproached her vigorously for the new trouble she might bring on Ezekiel, and on all of them, and her own conscience by no means held her blameless.

But Ezekiel, when they met, made no reference to the matter: though his eyes, Drusilla fancied, studied her with a kind of furtive watchfulness, as if she showed indications of some new strange depravity; or, in some way, had temporarily lost her footing in the household—had fallen from the intimate inner circle into the outer circle of strangers whose presence was a restraint.

As far as speech went, Ezekiel was silent to the point of moodiness: and no one seemed able to recover her spirits while he was in the house.

Drusilla, also, was very quiet and subdued: in fact, for *her*, she was surprisingly silent. For once, she let Morvenna do the chief part of the talking: nor did she recover, even partially, from the embarrassment of the revelation, until Ezekiel was out of the house and off to his crab-pots.

During the remainder of the day, even when she was alone with her mother, Drusilla was equally bitted by restraint. At no time did she "let herself go" as was her wont; and her gestures, and even her tones, were unwontedly subdued.

Morvenna was troubled by the revelation quite as much as the others. It seemed to place the whole household in a position of new insecurity. Propped up shakily on one side by a lie supported by Joe's vanity, and on the other side being steadily undermined the while by the

ceaseless, crafty burrowing of the pedlar, the fortunes and happiness of the family were as insecure as they could well be. And Morvenna was not only agitated; she was seriously alarmed. She did not share her father's feeling about "the other man"—that faceless figure the pedlar had conjured up before Ezekiel—nor could she comprehend why he clung so to the idea. The unspeakable relief the acceptance of the idea meant to Ezekiel (by lessening the sense of isolation that hitherto had appalled him) was something that Morvenna's mind had no conception of. She grieved for her father's gloomy perplexity; she was dimly frightened for herself and the shadows ahead of her; and she wondered, with just a little sense of ache, what the schoolmaster would say if, and when, the gossip reached him. Altogether, under the shock and confusion of these thoughts, she was as depressed as Drusilla, and perhaps even more wretched.

So wretched did she feel, that her harassed appearance in school that day greatly worried and perplexed the schoolmaster.

"You are overtaxing yourself, Morvenna, I'm sure you are. It troubles me to see you looking so thoroughly out of sorts," he remarked in a voice of affectionate anxiety. "Why not take a run up to Choone bottoms and back? I'll let you leave early, if you would prefer to go alone."

"It isn't *that*, Mr. Richards: it isn't that I wouldn't go with *you*."

"Well, come with me for half-an-hour's walk after school. Will you, Morvenna? Do, now! Just to please me!"

"I will, after the wedding: I can't before, Mr. Richards," she replied, sinking her voice, her eyes evading his. "That is," she added, colouring (and not now from mere sentiment), "I will, after the wedding—if you want me to, then."

"Of course, I shall want you to! I am waiting anxiously for you to be free. Indeed, I'm afraid I am looking forward to the treat almost too eagerly."

Morvenna made no reply: wondering whether he would say the same if he knew all that was in her mind: her heart the while, under the ache of these thoughts, paining her to an extent that made her look strangely wan and pinched.

The schoolmaster marvelled at her silence and at the trouble in her face, but he forebore to press the matter any further at present.

When they were leaving the school, however, he took his place at her side, without any remark, and walked down the valley with her, chatting to her pleasantly. He tried his hardest to bring back to her face a glint of its old happiness, and succeeded so far, through his persistent good-humour, that presently she began to laugh with something like heartiness. Finally, the charming girlish sunniness crept back into her features; her cheeks began to bloom rosily and her lips curved to their old provocativeness. After all, she was young, and... love was irresistible! Under its glance how could she be otherwise than happy?

Ezekiel was out on the sea-front as usual—engaged now in repairing some broken crab-pots—and the schoolmaster remarked, as they saw him in the distance, “What a world of things your father must know about the sea! I should like to have a good long chat with him about crabbing and fishing: it would be better than sitting indoors on such a beautiful afternoon. Don’t you think it would, now, Morvenna?” he asked.

“Yes, I daresay it would,” replied Morvenna eagerly: and he could see her eyes brighten and gladden at the prospect. He did not know that it was the thought of her father having some one to talk to, that first of all, and pre-eminently, was so pleasing to Morvenna: though that it chanced to be the particular “some one” so interesting to herself, was something the girl by no means lost sight of. Glancing through the door, or peeping out through the window, she would be able to see the schoolmaster for so much longer! Perhaps he would see her, too—

he might even come to the door with her father! In any case (delightful prospect!) they would be near each other, and she would be at the edge of fairyland even if indoors.

Her face grew tremulously full of tenderness, and her pulse fairly danced at the delicious anticipation!

Seeing how much the idea seemed to please her, the schoolmaster walked down towards Ezekiel with Morvenna: and when the girl, blushing prettily at her part in the meeting, had set them chatting together with something like ease, she left them and went indoors to her mother.

Drusilla already was impatiently expecting her, sundry pieces of sewing for the wedding outfit waiting to claim her attention as soon as she took off her hat: but to Morvenna this, now, was a pleasure and not a task.

What a delightful evening that was, to be sure!

Nothing was a trouble or a weariness to Morvenna, her needle flew through her work, and she was as cheerful as a cricket.

Peeping often through the window, she assured herself that her father and the schoolmaster were getting on excellently well together. The schoolmaster had seated himself close to the crab-pots, and the two men were smoking and chatting just like two old cronies.

Morvenna was delighted. She was deeply pleased for the sake of her father: she was gratified that the schoolmaster had found such favour in his eyes: and she was proud also that her father, rough and uneducated though he was, could hold a man like the schoolmaster so enthralled.

In every possible way, it was a most delicious evening!

Morvenna's heart leaped and fluttered, her cheeks filled with colour, and her whole frame throbbed with a strange exultancy and unrest.

The supreme enchantment of love was on her: and everything that ministered to it was as honey to her thoughts.

At last—but all too soon!—the schoolmaster rose from his seat beside the crab-pots. Morvenna saw him give a

lingering glance at the cottage—how she wished that their eyes might have met, if only for a moment!—and then . . . for her, at least . . . the beautiful evening was over, and the grey of the gloaming seemed to set in all in an instant.

“I like that young man! it have done me good to talk to un,” Ezekiel remarked to Morvenna, as he entered the cottage.

Morvenna’s heart fell a-dancing, and her eyes shone with happiness.

“I’m *so* glad of it, father!” she cried, smiling delightedly.

CHAPTER XIII

YESTERDAY AND TO-MORROW

ON the Sunday before the wedding, Drusilla suggested to Joe that he should get Mr. Pengelly to lend them his trap for the occasion. They could then drive from her father’s cottage to the church at Choone, and back to their new home at the edge of Choone bottoms, in something like the style befitting the occasion.

“P’raps he would like to drop in to the wedding-supper: you can give him the invitation, if you think he would accept it,” added Drusilla, remembering many things that Joe was entirely ignorant of.

Ten years previously, when Drusilla was a girl of sixteen and the miller was a young man of nine-and-twenty, Robert Pengelly had been her “shiner” for a few summer months, and she had hoped, and tried to believe, that he really “had a mind to her.” But just at this time his father had died and left Robert the mill, and the “courting” (if such it were) had flickered out and come to nothing. In the last half-a-dozen years, Drusilla had not exchanged half-a-dozen words with him. She had so long ago given up all idea of him as a possible sweetheart that when his man, Joe

Rosevear, began to eye her and make up to her, she gladly jumped at the chance of securing Joe as a husband; carelessly indifferent to the fact that, in the freshness of her girlhood, his master had tasted her lips and had almost taught her to love him. Now that she was about to be married, it had struck her suddenly that she would like her old sweetheart (for such was the part she now gave him in the masque of her memories) to see her in her triumph as the wife of another man. She half hoped that, as a bachelor, he would regret his lost opportunity, and would be tantalised by the thought that she might have been *his* wife, if he had been less careless when he had the chance of her. It was thoughts of this kind that Drusilla's nature dwelt on by preference and her vanity took an almost insatiable delight in. And, so close though she was to marriage, she indulged in them whenever she had the chance: Robert Pengelly, or any other man she had flirted with, forming—in this shadowy revel of lost hopes and opportunities—a convenient lay-figure for her thoughts to dance gaily with.

On the Monday, Joe accordingly took the opportunity to ask Mr. Pengelly for the loan of the gig. And the miller—like Drusilla, remembering the past with a twitch of pleasure—granted it with a breezy heartiness at which Joe was greatly gratified.

So flattered was he, in fact, that he bashfully proffered the invitation: "P'raps thee'd drop in a minute or two to the weddin'-supper, Mester Pengelly? We shud be bra' an' pleased to see'ee, sir, an' shud take it as a favour."

"Right, Joe! I'll drop in for a few minutes, ef I can. But, mind! ef I do, I shall expect a kiss from the bride for the loan of the gig," he added laughingly.

Joe grinned approvingly. "Trust the wemmin—she waan't refuse 'ee, I'll be bound, sir," said he.

And with this the matter dropped and the talk turned again to business.

Joe duly reported his success to Drusilla, and laughingly told her what she would have to pay the miller for the loan of the gig.

Drusilla made no remark, though her cheeks burned hotly at the suggestion. It would not be the first kiss, by a long way, that Robert Pengelly had had from her. But the "first kiss" was always the sweetest, as well as the newest, and he had obtained *that* from her years ago—as she remembered vividly, even now.

The wedding went off without a hitch. It was a brilliant June day, delightfully warm and sunny, and the little church at Choone looked almost bright on the occasion, owing to the sunshine streaming in through the tall, barred windows, and the gaily-coloured dresses of the girls and women who were present.

The pedlar sat on the steps of the ancient cross in Choone village and fiddled loudly to the bridal party as they mounted the gig and drove off: and Joe (who had no more ear for music than a cow) was mightily pleased at the unexpected compliment.

"Why, the man es playin' a funeral hymn, surely!" remarked one of the villagers, suddenly recognising a familiar movement in the tune.

"No! 'tes impossible! The man wedn' be so wicked!"

"I tell'ee, he es! There! you listen to it now!" And the speaker began to repeat, beating the time the while:—

*"Infinite joy, or endless woe,
Depends on every breath;
And yet how unconcerned we go
Upon the brink of death!"*

"So 'tes! the vellun! the wicked li'l blaggard!"

"Here! thee stop that to wance! or we'll break thy fiddle across the head o' thee!"

"Do'ee hear, you!"

"Stop that, you darned l'il varmunt! else it'll be the wuss for'ee!" and one of them seized him roughly by the shoulder.

"Eh? Don't like the tune, don't'ee, friends?" quoth the pedlar leeringly, as he lowered the fiddle from his chin and rose slowly to his feet. "Well, tastes deffer. The man hisself dedn' mind it."

"Thee'rt a law, dirty scamp! best be off out o' this! Ef I had *my* way weth'ee, I'd duck'ee in the hoss-pond."

"No offence! no offence! 'Tes onnly my way!" cackled the pedlar, with another leer. And off he hobbled as quickly as he could.

Before the day was over, Joe and Drusilla were informed, by several officious friends, of the "unlucky" tune the pedlar had played them out of church with: and neither of them felt particularly comfortable at the knowledge.

"He do awe us a grudge," said Joe to Drusilla: "he'll pay it *wan* day for sartin; thee see!"

"Ay," said Ezekiel, who had overheard the gossip, "he's like Owld Nick, he do never forgit a debt." And, with that, Ezekiel lapsed into the old gloomy moodiness, which, during the day so far, he had kept reasonably out of sight.

"Still, we're marr-ried: he caan't undo *that*!" said Drusilla. "The passon have made us man an' wife—lev' un fiddle so much as he like!"

"It was a cruel thing to do!" said Morvenna, troubled in mind.

"We ha'n't heerd the last of *he*, yet," Malva added.

And the female gossips remarked in whispers—their minds looking ahead, as usual, to possible child-birth and its troubles—that it might have a wicked meaning *one* day, at any rate. And, with this, they glanced significantly at one another and shook their heads.

Still, in spite of this untoward incident and the comments it gave rise to, the wedding-supper passed off very successfully. In all, there were quite a dozen guests present, including Joe's sister and her husband, Mr. and Mrs. Roscorla, two or three unmarried friends of Drusilla, and, last but not least, Mr. Pengelly.

One of Drusilla's female friends, a guest on the occasion, well remembered when Drusilla and Robert Pengelly were supposed to be "shiners," or, at any rate, were remarkably "sweet" on each other. And of this she now slyly reminded Drusilla. "Seems like old days—don't it?—seein' thee and Robert Pengelly together. Thee ought to ha' stuck to un,

Drusilla, an' left ¹ he be the man!" she whispered insinuatingly into Drusilla's ear.

"I'm contented as things are, thank you, Janey!" said Drusilla shortly.

"Well, it wed be Robert Pengelly for *my* money!" And Janey began to ogle the miller determinedly.

A tall, burly, black-bearded man, with heavy flesh-folds under the eyes, and with the slight, but unmistakable, beginnings of a paunch, Robert Pengelly, as he moved to and fro among the guests, looked less the type of an unattached bachelor than of a reasonably satisfied domestic man; a husband with a healthy appetite and an equally healthy digestion, and one whose ambitions and passions, if not absolutely dead and buried, were, at any rate, rarely troublesome and could easily be appeased. That he was still unmarried was a misfortune, thought most of the girls of the parish. But, evidently, Mr. Pengelly thought otherwise. Or else, he had failed hitherto to find his affinity, and took the matter as philosophically as befitted a man of forty, who chanced to be a man of property, to boot.

The "fun" at the wedding-supper was hearty, if a little boisterous. Indeed, it was rather too noisy for Ezekiel, who looked as much out of place as a cormorant in a canary-cage. Morvenna, also, soon tired of the particular form the "fun" took. Accordingly, she and her father left the cottage somewhat early and walked home together through the quiet summer night, with a sense of exquisite relief at being out of the noise at last.

Malva, however, at Drusilla's especial request, agreed to stay till the end, in order to assist, it being arranged that she should come home with Mr. and Mrs. Roscorla, who had determined "to see the fun to the finish," as they expressed it.

It was nearly midnight before the party finally broke up. Among the last to go was the black-bearded miller,

¹ Local for "let."

who during the evening had been watching his old sweetheart with close attention: a compliment that Drusilla certainly had not repaid him in kind, though it is possible that (secretly) she had paid it in her thoughts.

As he was leaving, he remarked to Drusilla, "Well, what about the gig-hire? Joe promised me I should have a kiss from'ee for it."

"Well, le' Joe give it to'ee hisself," replied Drusilla; glancing at him with a sudden flashing of the eyes.

"Thee wedn' ha' said that *wance*," remarked the miller significantly, lowering his voice for her private ear.

"I was younger then—an' so wert thee."

"An' tha's true, too." And, with that, he remarked loudly, as he stood at the door, "Well, good night to'ee all! Good luck to'ee, Joe! An' the same to thee, Mrs. Rosevear."

"Thaank'ee, sir!" said Joe heartily.

But Drusilla remained silent.

CHAPTER XIV

THE DAZZLE OF LOVE

"THIS evening is to be *our* evening, then, Morvenna?" said the schoolmaster, his voice as full of happiness as his face.

"Yes," said Morvenna, dropping her eyes beneath his glance.

"Well, I am glad it is come at last! I hope you are as glad as I am, Morvenna."

"Yes, I think I am," answered Morvenna softly.

All that day the wine of anticipation was in their veins, exhilarating them to an extent that neither could disguise. Their eyes were bright and restless and flashed joyously at each other, their lips curved to smiles frequently, and their hearts were as buoyant as their thoughts.

Even in the midst of the noise and bustle of the school,

and the almost incessant demands on their attention, their thoughts drifted again and again to the exquisite dream-land of love; and all the green paths young feet find for themselves through it, seemed to open out before them with fascinating vividness.

The husky cawing of crows drifted in through the open door, and occasionally, from the clump of trees near the schoolhouse, the call of the cuckoo floated in faintly. The hot June sunshine beat dazzlingly on the window-panes, and the bees hummed in and out with the impudent freedom of flies. The children were rosily warm, but not unhappy: and the schoolmaster and Morvenna—they were warm and happy both!

The schoolmaster had always had in him a touch of the dumb poet—a passion for beauty and beautiful things, a great hungering after nature, and a modesty in the face of life and its infinite mysteries which had tended to keep him solitary, yet curiously quick with thought. And the full strength of these moods he had recently been concentrating on Morvenna: with the result that at last he was in love with his little assistant with all the deep and steadfast passion that his nature was capable of.

To him, Morvenna, in her sweet, girlish modesty, so fresh and naif and sunny as she was, seemed to embody the very ideal of maidenhood. And his love for her—now that it was aware of itself as love—permeated his nature in its every nook and cranny, vibrated in every fibre of him, and was as active as his blood itself.

Likings he might have many—no man has ever yet escaped them—but never in all his life would he have another love like this!

And Morvenna—girl though she was, or because she was so girlish—her heart had gone out of her keeping before she was even aware of it. The yearning hunger, the trembling modesty, the enchantment of this love, all the sweetness and the bewildering dazzle of it had surprised her at her freshest moment: and the girl was at its mercy and was joyously glad that it was so.

In the cadences of her voice, in her glowing face, in her lips so prompt to second her heart, but most of all in the strange wonder and happiness in her eyes, the new hope and the new gladness were irresistibly manifest. And so deeply was she aware of it, so exquisitely conscious of it in every fibre, that she was half ashamed this afternoon to let the schoolmaster see her face.

When the school was at last dismissed and they were out in the lane together, the schoolmaster and Morvenna wandered off like people in a dream.

Through sequestered lanes full of the scent of green things growing and of the exquisite perfumes of briar-roses and trailing sprays of honeysuckle, under the pleasant shade of tall green trees with their long leaves fluttering and whispering drowsily, past cattle grazing lazily, past the groups of mowers in the hay-meadows, past happy-faced children picking flowers in the hedges, on and on the schoolmaster and Morvenna wandered tirelessly: talking they scarcely knew of what, but so happy all the time!

Presently they found themselves, almost without knowing how they got there, among the ferny tangle in the grove at the head of the valley.

It was a still, green, out-of-the world spot: big, rough-barked trunks in every direction and overhead the widely spread, interlacing branches; with occasional breaks where the June sky looked through briefly, making the heart ache at its far-off beauty. Thousands of foxgloves were in flower in the breezier openings among the trees, forming in places a dense, rich mass of colour that glowed through the soft green twilight voluptuously; and patches of vividly blossoming gorse and daintier broom flashed on the eye from the knolls or out of the hollows, till a sense of something like glamour stole over the senses, and made fairy-land, dreamland, the paradise of love itself, seem only a single step on the other side of the actual.

Through the soft green gloom the schoolmaster and Morvenna wandered dreamily—now over patches of smooth

springy sward, now ankle-deep in hyacinths and masses of dog-violets, and now through the dry dead leaves of the previous autumn—wandered on in a silence that was almost perilous, so plainly could they hear their hearts and feel the lilt of their thoughts.

All around them the cuckoos were calling to each other, the wood-doves crooned their somnolent "*coo-croo-oo!*" the leaves at intervals rustled clappingly, the hum of the bees was in their ears.

Presently the schoolmaster, with a sudden tremble in his voice, asked Morvenna to sit down for a few minutes to rest herself.

Morvenna seated herself in silence, strangely timid, yet strangely happy.

A lane of glimmering sunshine ended a little distance from her, and, looking upward in that direction, she could see an exquisite space of sky, with the fringed sprays of the trees pencilled greenly at the edge of it. At her back sounded the drowsy *coo-croo-oo!* her breasts heaved beneath her bodice, her heart panting softly; the light fell on her face almost with a loving tenderness, so tempered was it; and (best of all and sweetest) the schoolmaster was at her side!

"Morvenna!" said the schoolmaster abruptly, putting his hand over hers, which was lying on her lap within easy distance of him.

"Yes," said Morvenna softly, but without turning her eyes towards him.

"Morvenna!" he repeated again: and his voice startled her by its intensity and its unfamiliar note. "Morvenna! . . . if I said I loved you . . ."

"Say it!" whispered Morvenna tremulously.

"My precious one, how I love you!" he cried, bending over her tenderly.

And with that he put his arm around her and drew her to him hungrily: and she nestled her head upon his shoulder, her cheek resting against his.

"I know it, *dear*," she whispered: the caressing word

(new and deliciously strange though it was) coming to her as naturally as its mating-note to a bird.

"My darling! how I love you!"

"I know it! I *know* it, dear!" she cried to him joyously.

"And you love me, Morvenna? Really and truly love me?" he asked anxiously.

"What else, dear, have I been doing all these weeks?" she replied gently.

Paul drew her still closer to him—their faces turned to each other frankly—and their lips met at last in a long, clinging kiss.

The kiss was again and again repeated in all its passionate ardour, and then they leaned their cheeks together, brimming with love and so happy!

So happy! so happy! It was the air of Paradise they breathed!

Many hours and many forms of joy life might have in store for them—would they ever have another so sweet and exquisite as this?

CHAPTER XV

THE WIND IN THE TREES

"Don't b'leeve in fortune-tellin', s'pose; or in charmin' ayther—do'ee, sir?"

The schoolmaster looked up from his book in surprise. Morvenna could not come out with him, being busy at home with her mother—her duties having increased greatly since Drusilla's marriage—and he had sauntered out here among the trees at the edge of the stream to read and lazily enjoy himself in the quiet of the afternoon. He was leaning back against the trunk of a wide-branched elm reading an English translation of Epictetus, and had thought that he was absolutely alone in his nook. Alone, that is, with the birds and the rabbits, with the vagrant butterflies, drifting idly, and the busily humming bees;

which for the last couple of hours had been all his company. To hear a cackling voice suddenly propounding a question over his shoulder, and that a question that might almost have come from some old wood-gnome, was just a little startling, to say the least of it.

He glanced hastily over his shoulder, with a look sufficiently surprised; and then, as the pedlar came hobbling round in front of him with his old brown fiddle under his arm, he replied, somewhat distantly, "Why do you ask, my man?"

"Why, because thee'rt a schoolmaster and I seed'ee raidin' that book," and he pointed to the little red-bound edition of Epictetus. "Thee'rt s'posed to be a knawin' wan, round about here. So'm I—though not in thy way, b'leeve."

"Ah!" replied the schoolmaster, in a non-committal tone.

"Iss, I can charm an' tell fortunes a bit; an' I can fiddle a bit, too," added the pedlar, touching the instrument. "Like to hear a tune, wed'ee? I do know some beauties!"

The schoolmaster looked the little oddity over from head to foot; noting his gleaming, beady eyes, his tousled black hair (almost as long and lank as the locks of a deck-mop), and his thin, cruel fingers, like the wrinkled claws of a bird.

"Well, I hardly know," said the schoolmaster undecidedly. He was perplexed by the strange fascination of repulsion which, here in the green, sap-sweetened atmosphere, the odd little figure seemed to exercise over him.

"I larned this from the gipsies," said the pedlar, raising his fiddle to his chin; and with that he struck, all at once, into a fantasia of the oddest and wildest character: a caprice whose startlingly contrasted effects seemed almost to touch the tap-roots of the schoolmaster's nerves.

Ripple, ripple, ripple, went the laughter of the maidens; and then crashed in the angry cries of the men: now the women-folk were feeding one with wine and honey till the veins throbbed voluptuously and the brain was in

a whirl; and now the men-folk were savagely hacking at one with knives—piercing, cutting, slashing venomously—till the nerves were anguished poignantly down to the very roots: the whole ending in a sound so barbarously like a screech of agony, that the schoolmaster sprang to his feet with the sweat starting to his brow.

"What possessed you, man, to play such a piece as that!" he cried angrily.

"No offence! no offence!" replied the pedlar deprecatingly. "I onnly done it to shaw'ee that I got gifts, so to spaik. Thee waan't think the less o' me for it in the long run, I'll be bound."

"I didn't think you had it in you," remarked the schoolmaster, eyeing him thoughtfully.

"Tha's what many do sim to feel when I do charm an' tell fortunes. Ef I towld'ee thy fortune now, sir—no offence! but I cud do it—it wed s'prise'ee, p'raps, to notice how clain it'll come true."

The schoolmaster stared at him with a dreamy wonder.

"Nonsense, my good man!" he managed to say, at last. "If you know fortunes, why not tell your own?"

"*That* esn' to be: They Who gov' us the power don't allow it. But—it ben towld to me," said the pedlar, his eyes dulling. "I ha'n't lived like awther men esactly, so to spaik: an' I shaan't esactly die like them, so to spaik agen."

The schoolmaster looked at the man more and more perplexedly. He was prepared now to listen to him not only with patience but with interest.

"So you charm and tell fortunes?" he remarked questioningly to the pedlar. "And do you find the folks fairly" (*credulous*, he was about to say, but he changed the word abruptly, and phrased it), "fairly willing to believe you?"

"They caan't help theirselves: 'tes in the blood, sir," said the pedlar. "Go back so fur as thee like, there all'ys ben charmin' an' fortune-tellin': same as there all'ys ben schoolmasters, s'pose, an' they praichers. Thee ha'n't got no idea, a man to wan side like thee, sir—I main a

man all'ys raidin' books, an' out o' wemmin's gossip, an' not goin' to the kiddly-wink¹ nor nawthin' that 'ud make'ee sociable like weth awthers—no offence, sir! 'tes onnly my way of expressin' meself—but, awin' to thaise things, thee don't knaw the folks, sir, as I do."

"That's true," said the schoolmaster, again seating himself under the tree. "I know the children a little, but their parents seem to fight shy of me."

"O' coorse they do, sir: stand to raison they wed. Thee bein' so clever weth thy tongue, an' so book-larned an' that sort o' thing: an' they bein' onnly a passel o' bussa-brains an' boobas.² Now, *I* do knaw them, sir, 'cause I ben reared up weth them: an' I'm wan o' theirselves, so to spaik," said the pedlar: "a graft o' the same stock," he added, seating himself near the schoolmaster. "An' I do see a bra' lot o' things that nowan wedn' draim of," he remarked, drawing up his knees and laying the fiddle across them, and then resting his chin on the fiddle itself.

The schoolmaster stared at him with a fixed, attentive gaze, listening to his garrulous talk without protest or rejoinder. It was almost as if the odd little figure had charmed the schoolmaster's mind asleep, and was imposing his own thoughts on the somnolent consciousness.

Fixing his glittering little eyes on the dreamy eyes of the schoolmaster, the pedlar began to dilate on his experiences in charming and fortune-telling: relating strange cures that he had effected by means extravagant and often grotesque, and fortunes that he had forecasted with an accuracy as startling as if he had peeped into the book of Fate.

And all the talk, or so it seemed to the schoolmaster, was directed to proving to him the inherent deceitfulness and untrustworthiness of human nature; its love of subterfuge and chicanery; its unappeasable appetites; its restlessness, its vanity, its clamant dissatisfaction.

As he sat here among the trees in the sap-impregnated atmosphere, the pollen of the flowers and grasses wafted

¹ Public-house.

² Empty-heads and fools.

incessantly to his nostrils, in his ears the hum of bees and the mating-songs of birds, and the garrulous babble of the brook and of the pedlar blending drowsily in his consciousness, the schoolmaster drifted insensibly into one of his dreamy moods.

He felt a strange touch of kinship with the growths and inhabitants of the grove stirring in the inner sap of his nature and at the very root and centre of his brain. It seemed to him as though the oaks waved their gnarled arms to him like old acquaintances greeting him on the village highway; that the birds gliding to and fro among the fresh green leaves, with their little beady eyes glancing at him furtively, wanted to tell him something, he was not sure what; and that the wind stirring the boughs, and the stream rippling among the rushes, had also something to communicate, if he could only understand.

This feeling that the woodland was endeavouring to impart something to him, was trying to impress his consciousness with some mood of its own, produced in him such an odd sense of unusualness, that he felt like a man half asleep—drowsing helplessly—and listening the while to a revelation that, if he were awake, would have seemed to him merely extravagant, nothing less and nothing more.

The trees were no longer domes of greenery, supported on rough-barked pillars rooted firmly in the sward, they were simply vegetable vampires sucking greedily from Mother Earth the nutriment they hungered after and stored in every fibre. The flowers were insatiable mouths ever gaping after sustenance, mere advertisements of an appetite whose satisfaction was their life. The birds among the boughs, and the rabbits scuttling through the ferns, were but clever variations on the same monotonous theme: were merely appetites incarnate, nothing more and nothing less. And the grove populous with life—from the swarms of insects among the grasses to the foxes and rabbits in the coverts, and the moles and worms burrowing craftily beneath the soil—was like a devil's mouth full of busy grinders, ever feeding a belly as insatiable as Death.

Suddenly the pedlar, in moving his head, unintentionally struck his chin on the strings of the fiddle, and evoked from them a sound so startlingly like a wail that the schoolmaster was abruptly roused out of his reverie.

"What was that?" he asked disquietedly, his eyes questioning right and left.

"Onnly my chin touched the strings," answered the pedlar, staring at him watchfully. "Ded'ee think 'twas the cry o' that man I was tellin'ee 'bout?"

"What man?" asked the schoolmaster, perplexedly.

"That man whose wife pushed un ovver Kimyell cleff 'cause she wanted her cousin, an' 'cause *he* wanted she; they both bein' young wans, an' restless," explained the pedlar.

"What was done to her?" asked the schoolmaster.

"Done to her!" echoed the pedlar. "Why, nawthin', that I do know of. She's livin' now—well an' hearty—an' got haaf-a-dozen cheldern. Never had none by her fust man—an' that was haaf the trouble. But by her cousin she got them fast enough to satisfy her, I shud think: they come 'most tumblin' ovver ayche awther's heels, so to spaik."

"Living now—and well and hearty!" repeated the schoolmaster reflectively.

"What else shud she be? havin' got her way, an' all she wanted. I sowld her some frillin' for her neck not two days sence. She do carr-ry her age well: don't look a day more'n thirty. An' she esn' the fust, an' waan't be the last wan, I 'spect, who've played the same game" (here the pedlar lowered his voice) "an' cleared the board in some such way after it, sir. They're all'ys worryin' me for charms an' to tell their fortunes, the wemmin are: twenty, iss, a hunderd times wuss than the men, they are. I wedn' trust a woman, owld or young, so far as I cud see her." And with that he began tentatively to open his budget of tales that handled, coarsely enough, the frailty and falsity of women: unmarried girls, young wives, matrons older if not slyer, all of them, in his experiences, having added to his budget freely.

But the schoolmaster stopped him abruptly. "Thank

you, I don't wish to hear tales of that kind." And he rose to his feet and prepared to walk away.

The pedlar, rising also, hobbled up to his side. "No offence! no offence!" he remarked, blinking up deprecatingly. "I'm owlder than thee art, sir—years an' years owlder—an' I thought I'd warn'ee, friendly like, 'genst wemmin an' their ways. Not mainin' no offence, sir! An' beggin' your pardon ef I said anything in my coose¹ way, sir, that have vexed'ee."

"Oh, I quite understand that you intended no offence. The afternoon is slipping away; I must be turning homewards."

The pedlar hobbled along at the schoolmaster's side, his old brown fiddle tucked under his arm. "As fine a charm as I do know for keepin' a woman true to a man," said he, still sticking persistently to his theme, "es to git a lock of her heer an' a lock of her faather's an' a lock o' the heer o' the man who do want to tie her to un. Buried, weth a charm that I do know of said over them, that do tie the woman as fast as the coffin-nails do fasten down a corpse. Ef ever you shud have a mind to a young woman, now, sir, an' wed git a lock of her heer an' a lock of her *faather's*, mind! an' gi' them to me weth a lock o' thy awn—an' mind! all o' them sep'rate, else 'twed spoil the charm—I cud tie the maid's thoughts to'ee, sir, so fast as never was: never waver, nor change, she wedn'—no more than the sun hisself! No fear o' she, then, bein' like they awther wans I towld'ee of: all'ys the same she wed be to'ee, sir; an' all'ys so true as truth!"

"Why her hair and her father's?"

"Heer's a powerful strange thing, sir: a part o' wan's life, so to spaik," answered the pedlar, a little haltingly. "An' it do act cureyus on wan in many ways. An'... anyway, heer it must be!"

"Why her father's hair? Why not her mother's?" asked the schoolmaster: putting the question idly, or merely to perplex the pedlar.

¹ Coarse.

The odd little creature gave him a quick, suspicious glance; his beady black eyes glittering restlessly and almost angrily. "'Tis a part o' the charm," he mumbled confusedly, dropping his head. "An' it wed be well wuth thy tryin' sir," he added confidentially: "that es, ef thee got any young maid in thy mind, sir."

"Thanks! If ever I feel like trying it, I'll let you know," said the schoolmaster carelessly.

"I'm owlder than thee art an' I do knaw young folks ways, sir, an' do sympathise weth them; an' I've seed'ee, sir, weth as nice an' putty a young maiden..."

"That will do, my man!" said the schoolmaster, with warning sternness.

"It wedn' do'ee no harm in the world, nor she nayther, sir!"

"That will do, my man!"

The pedlar glanced up at him furtively—a watchful, wily look that, for all its fleetingness, studied him closely.

Evidently he recognised that to continue the subject further would be useless: so he remarked, with as near an approach to his old manner as he could manage, "No offence, sir! no offence! An' owld fortune-teller an' charmer I be, sir, an' ben all'ys: an' a man caan't wash his hands of his trade, all in a minute, sir."

"Well, good evening," said the schoolmaster, as they presently emerged from the grove on to the highway.

"Good ayv'nin' to'ee, sir! good ayv'nin'!" replied the pedlar, touching his hat.

If Ezekiel had escaped a new peril this afternoon, it was only the little pedlar who was aware of the fact: the schoolmaster had not even remotely guessed at it.

But the pedlar owed him a grudge for the defeat, none the less.

CHAPTER XVI

WEDDED BLISS

CONSIDERED dispassionately, Drusilla's marriage was not a brilliant success: although "as men go" (in the sarcastic phrase of the women-folk) Joe Rosevear might be said to be a reasonably good husband.

True, he was not particularly affectionate; but neither was he (for a man) exceptionally unkind. A bit rough in his talk, and in his ways more than a bit selfish, he was still, on the whole, in his failings as well as in his virtues, average and middling, like a pilchard out of a bussaful.¹

He liked the strongest cup of tea and the best slice of bread and butter, and if one fermade² only were left in the bussa, that fermade must be kept for Joe, whoever else might be in want of it. Then he must have his weekly ounce of tobacco and his pint of beer daily, no matter how inelastic his wages might be, or what other necessary expenses had to be met. And if Drusilla wanted a pair of shoes and Joe desired a new "billycock," it was the hat, and not the shoes, that was the first to be purchased. In fact, if anything in the household expenses had to be cut fine, it was Drusilla's stomach, and not Joe's, that had to suffer for it in the end.

Joe considered that if he had a fault as a man (and he would not deny that this was possible: he would be fair all round) then his fault was that he was a little too inconsiderate towards himself: a little too inclined to accept, without question, privations and limitations that he had every right to rebel against.

Other men, for instance, he would sometimes remind Drusilla, allowed themselves an ounce and a half of "packet" tobacco weekly, while he was contented with a trumpery

¹ Bussa = jar.

² Pilchards cured by a special process.

ounce of shag: and many men, instead of a pint of beer a day—but, there! he would say nothing: he would make a pint do for *him*. Had he been single, now, he would have had his couple of pints and his couple of ounces . . . but, seeing that he was married, he must make the best of it, he supposed. And with this he would close the discussion with the sigh of one resigned.

It was an education for Drusilla to live with a man of this stamp, after having lived with a man so unselfish as her father: and the effect of the experience on her was shown in fifty different ways.

Still, she determined, once for all, that she would not make a laughing-stock of herself before the parish. If they thought to fry her for a fool, they should lose their fat, she decided.

The stronger nature—stronger by reason of its more concentrated selfishness—therefore ruled in the house, and Drusilla bowed to the yoke in silence. She was married, and she had the expectancy of motherhood to look forward to: the compensations of her position she might possibly find in this.

But Drusilla's neighbours were not so blind as she tried to hope they were.

To them, the drama at the hearthside appealed only as a comedy: and it was vastly amusing to them, cackling together of an afternoon, to recall how the big blonde woman, with her soft pinky attractiveness, was led by the nose, so to speak, by her little bullet-headed husband, and made to sing to *his* tune, whatever it might chance to be.

To and fro in the parish Joe would strut of a Sunday, eyeing the girls with an attentiveness which they were by no means anxious for, now that he had done his marketing and was no longer a possible purchaser. But that they giggled at him and ridiculed him mercilessly among themselves, he was quite unaware of, and would not have believed had he been told of it: so tightly had Vanity stuffed her cotton in his ears.

In his looking-glass he had no competitor: as he was

aware each time he looked in it. And what was the world but a bigger looking-glass, mirroring an equally attractive man?

So placid was his conceit that even Drusilla was occasionally blinded by it, and credited its report almost to the verge of jealousy.

When he came home boasting how this girl had stared at him, and how that girl had offered him a big bunch of pansies, while a third had loitered at the mill on purpose to chat with him, Drusilla would flare out against the impudent hussies, and tell him that a married man ought to know better. If she had her way, she would say, all men when they were married should wear nose-rings like pigs, so that unmarried girls might be saved from making fools of themselves.

Joe, however, merely grinned, with a sense of deep satisfaction; and felt half a foot taller as he strutted about the kitchen with his fat thumbs stuck in the armholes of his waistcoat.

But the piquancy of the situation was rapidly exhausted. The girls soon grew tired of "making eyes" at a married man merely to tempt him to make a fool of himself for their private delectation. His conceit might be inexhaustible — apparently it was — but the fun of the game was quickly over, as far as they were concerned. So, presently, one after another, they gave Joe "the go by"; and the waggoner began to feel that his world was getting emptier, and that being a married man distinctly had its drawbacks.

That his neglect of his personal appearance was the reason why the girls had begun to think less of him, struck Joe as the only possible explanation of the matter: and the cause rankled in his mind quite as much as the effect did. Indeed, the question of money had begun to fret him from the first. Now he had a wife to keep and a cottage to pay the rent of, it was impossible for him to spend as much on hats and neckties, on showy trousers and on showier tan gloves, as he had been able to do when he was a jaunty bachelor and all that came out of his pocket he could spend freely on himself.

As a consequence, Joe gradually began to get discontented. Although he had been married only a few months, he longed for a change of some kind—indeed, of any kind. He felt, however, that, above everything, he would prefer a change of scene: a new stage and a new audience, and new “properties” throughout. Married life had entirely failed to satisfy his vanity: and his vanity was the tap-root of his nature, as we know.

Presently it struck him that, if he could get an increase of wages, *that* might perhaps put matters right for him.

So he went to Mr. Pengelly and asked, doubtfully, for a rise.

“True,” said the miller, when Joe broached the subject to him, “thy wages arn’t enough for a marr-ried man to make a shaw on. *That* I awn to’ee, Joe, straight an’ feer. But they’re all that I can give’ee: an’ more than I can raily afford.”

“A shillin’ a week extry, ef thee cud manage it . . .” began Joe.

“Caan’t afford it—tha’s a fact!” said the miller emphatically. “Ef thee left me to-morra—an’ a likely man, like thee, may do so any day, I do knaw—I shud take on a bachelor, not anawther marr-ried man. An’ he’d ha’ to be content weth less than I gi’ thee. I’m payin’ee raily more than I can afford, as it es. Ef it hadn’ ben that thee’rt a new-marr-ried man,” he added ruminatingly, “b’leeve I shud ha’ to make a change as it es.”

Joe tugged at his moustache with a very glum look.

“I don’t ask’ee to layve, o’ coorse not,” said the miller: “but, raily, now . . . ef thee said thee wanted to go . . . well, I shudn’ ha’ the heart to ask’ee to stay. This esn’ the place for a smart man like thee. Thee’rt wurth more than I can give’ee: that I admit. An’ thee wed get it, ef thee got thy deserts, Joe, man. Thee got wan o’ the best headpieces in the parr-rish, I do knaw. But there’s no scope here for a clever man like thee.”

“Tha’s true,” said Joe gloomily. “’Tes a li’l cramped place, hardly big enough to swing a cat in.”

"Why not try thy luck in America?" said the miller. "'Tis a big place that. Plenty o' room an' plenty o' money there for'ee, Joe."

"Tha's true, too," replied Joe meditatively.

"I shud think so!" said the miller enthusiastically. "'Tis the onnly place, b'leeve, to make a fortune in now-a-days. Look at Sam Hosken's son—see the money he do send home! An' Bill Angove—weth his li'l shop up on the turnpike. The money for that come from America—an' aisily arned, too. A man can make a fortune out there in no time. Here in this owld country he can barely arn his bread. But o' coorse, we do all of us knaw," he added, "that *thee'll* never think o' layvin' the country. We do knaw what 'tes—a young marr-ried man—thee'rt tied to the leg o' the table by a new pair o' garters!" and the miller burst out laughing heartily.

"Don't knaw so much about that," said Joe.

"*Thee* don't knaw: but *I* do," said the miller. "Thee'rt like all young husbands—for the fust twelve months or so. Caan't run farther than thy wife's apron-strings 'ull let'ee!" and with that he laughed out heartily again.

"Don't knaw so much about *that*, Mester Pengelly!" repeated Joe, with a touch of temper.

"Why, 'tes ayven gittin' a bit of a joke 'mong the maidens 'bout 'ee. 'As soapy-soft as Joe Rosevear,' I heerd wan o' them say yesterday, 'all'ys runnin' home to tie up his wife's shoe-strings!'"

"I'd go to America to-morra, ef I cud pay me passage!" said Joe angrily.

"Well, man, ask thy faather-in-law to assist'ee."

Joe relapsed into gloomy silence. And with this the subject dropped.

CHAPTER XVII

ANTICIPATIONS AND MEMORIES

WHILE Drusilla was thus paying for her experiences as a wife, and Joe was nursing his discontent and hungering restlessly for a change, the life in the cottage in the cove went on much the same as usual.

Morvenna and the schoolmaster were now looked on by the folks in the cove as "reg'lar sweethearts, an' a bra' putty couple, too." It was, of course, quite understood that Morvenna was too young to marry at present; but her parents had given their consent to her being married when she was nineteen, and accordingly (to the girl's satisfaction quite as much as to that of the schoolmaster) it was arranged that on Morvenna's nineteenth birthday she should give herself to her sweetheart as his wife. They had, therefore, less than a couple of years to wait for their final happiness, and Morvenna had already begun quietly to make preparations for it.

The schoolmaster had given her an engagement ring and also a gold "keeper," and these she wore on her "engagement finger" with a girlish pride that was delightful. Indeed, it was one of the fantastic pleasures of the lovers, for the schoolmaster, before the last kiss at parting, always to give a kiss to the little ringed finger: which, for that reason, was to Morvenna a symbol as precious as she could conceive of.

The "courting" of Morvenna by the schoolmaster, and her happy girlish response to it, was watched with kindly sympathy by most of the Polurrian folk. They had a great liking for the schoolmaster, in their hearty country fashion, and little Morvenna (though, of course, less of a public character, and, to that extent, less noticed by and less interesting to them) was frankly liked by them for her pretty freshness and her girlish modesty.

Two or three of the rougher "cove chaps," however, were by no means so well pleased by this appropriation of Morvenna: even though the girl was so gladly a party to it. And the youngster whose "heart" was more particularly made sore, was especially eager to show his displeasure: not against Morvenna, whom he was shyly afraid of, but against "that darned stuck-up schoolmaaster."

Talking over with this one, and that one, the possibility of "paying out" the schoolmaster, the youngster finally thought of sounding the pedlar on the subject, and found Tom the Hangman heartily willing to assist him.

"Why not rull un?" quoth Tom the Hangman.

"Rull un? Wha's that?" asked the youngster, in surprise.

The word is primarily a miner's term—the lads in the mines who wheel the barrows being spoken of as "rullers"—and the form of punishment it indicates, when used for this purpose, is more particularly indulged in among the mining communities. But the pedlar, in his wanderings to and fro in the peninsula, had come to know the mines of St. Just and St. Ives, and those at work near Marazion, with an intimate knowledge which very few peasants could boast of. And the customs, as well as the slang and phrases of the miners, were as familiar to him as were those of the widely differing fisher-folk. He was therefore prepared to "coach" the youngster (or any one else) in rulling, or in any other form of mischief; and he already licked his lips in anticipation of the fun.

His explanation practically amounted to this:—

When a young fellow is disappointed in obtaining the girl he has set his heart on, he sometimes gets together a band of youngsters like himself and arranges to "rull" his successful rival. The whole plot, of course, is kept strictly private. A wheelbarrow is borrowed from the mine, or from some friendly sympathiser; a dark night is chosen, and a lonely spot; and then the successful one is set on by the band of youngsters lying in wait for him, is bundled into the wheelbarrow and held down in it by main force, and

is wheeled to a convenient pond, in which he is ducked unmercifully.¹

"Iss, that wed be something like fun!" cried the youngster. "That wed take the starch out o' Mester Stuck-up!" and he slapped his thigh delightedly, his face all a-grin. "He'd be ashamed to shaw his face in the cove agen, wedn'a?"

"No doubt! no doubt!" remarked the pedlar, sympathetically.

"And Morvenna—she'd ha' to give un up after that?"

"Iss, no doubt! no doubt!" quoth the pedlar.

"They usually do, s'pose—the girls?" questioned the youngster.

"Usually—iss!" said the pedlar, in his smoothest manner.

"Ded'ee ever knaw a girl who dedn'?" demanded the youngster.

"Ever . . . well . . . *ever* es a long day, esn't it? Iss, I ded knaw of *wan*," said the pedlar. "But she was deffernt to the li'l wan thee just ben spaikin' about. She had more of Owld Nick in her—an' a temper as hot as fire."

"Ded they rull her shiner?"

"Iss, that they ded! I was in the parr-rish at the time—it happened ovver to Poljew—an' I seed the fun from beginnin' to end. Polly—Polly Townshend was her name, between ourselves—well, Polly she promised herself to wan o' the miner chaps; an' then, when he went off to America to make a fortune for her, she took up weth a li'l skinny schoolmaster: wan who come to the parr-rish after her shiner went away. Well, Tom Tregoning (that was the name of her shiner) after a time he come back agen right 'nuff, an' he found she an' the li'l schoolmaster runnin' round together an' courtin' an' kissing all so hot as fire. So Tom he arranged weth some owld friends of his to gi' the school-

¹ Several cases of "rulling" have come under my personal knowledge. The saddest I know of, in the life-tragedies it ultimately culminated in, occurred in a little mining village not five miles from the town of Penzance: the girl is now in a lunatic asylum, and the man is a helpless paralytic.

maaster a rullin' an' make Polly knaw her place. Ezra Jacks was the schoolmaaster's name, an' a skinny wan he was—as thin as a scraped bone, an' weth a head as soft as a boiled turnip—an' I tell'ee they managed it *beautifully* between them!" and the pedlar lingered over the word with evident gusto. "All so saycret as sin it was kept, awin' to Tom's cleverness, so they caught the li'l skunk just outside o' Poljew an' tied un down in the barra ('cause he kicked-up such a dydo)¹ an' then soused un in the hoss-pond 'till you cud smill un a mile off! Lord, how I *ded* laugh, when I seed Tom rullin' un through the village! The schoolmaster was as wet as a shag—weth his face as white as flour—an' he was all ovver green slime an' awther such muck, an' they was singin' away so hearty, Tom Tregoning an' all of them:—

*'Wait for the wan-wheel, wait for the wan-wheel,
Wait for the wan-wheel, an' you shall have a ride!'*"

The pedlar stopped to laugh and to linger over the reminiscence, but the youngster urged him on. "An' the girl?" he demanded breathlessly. What did *she* do, when she knawed of it, Tom?"

"Lord bless'ee," laughed the pedlar, "that was the best o' the fun! We rulled un up to her door, in the barra just as he was, an', when we come to the door, Tom he rapped at it weth his knuckles, an' '*Oppen!*' says he; '*we've brought thy shiner home for'ee!*' An' weth that we all of us bust out singin':—

*'Wait for the wan-wheel, wait for the wan-wheel,
Wait for the wan-wheel, an' you shall have a ride!'*

"Polly she come bouncin' to the door in a tantrum, an' '*What'ee want?*' she screamed, an' hit Tom a slap in the face. She'd got a table-knife in her hand—ben cuttin' bread an' butter, s'pose—an' up at Tom she jumped, an' tried to run un through. Tom, he jumped back, so brisk as a monkey, an' '*Here! we've brought'ee home thy shiner!*' says he! '*We*

¹ An ado.

ben takin' un for a ride in the wan-wheel coach! An' weth that we all of us bust out agen:—

*'Wait for the wan-wheel, wait for the wan-wheel,
Wait for the wan-wheel, an' you shall have a ride!'*

“But Polly she screamed to us, *'Stand away there, you fools!'* An' up to the barra she runned an' beganned hackin' at the ropes of it. *'Ef you touch me, any of 'ee,'* she screeched to us, *'I'll run the knife in'ee, as sure as God's alive!'*

“Well, to tell'ee the truth, we *dedn'* touch her—none of us. We cud see she was as mad as a wild cat an' wed fight like wan; an' she cut the ropes an' bundled out Ezra an' sot un on his feet and wiped his face for'n, all the same as ef (instead of his sweetheart) she was his mawther.

“*'A fine shiner thee'st got there!'* Tom Tregoning he says to her. An', weth that, the li'l devil up an' jumped at un weth a jab o' the knife! An' Tom he jumped back weth the blood skeetin'¹ from his fingers: *'You darned li'l vixen!'* says he, *'you've cut me hand oppen—cuss'ee!'*

“But Polly she pulled Ezra in an' slammed the fore-door² on us; an' off we had to go weth the empty barra an' nawthin else.”

“An' what happened then? Ded she marr-ry un?” asked the youngster breathlessly.

“Iss, that she ded! the li'l pig-headed monkey! Married by banns they was, too—as bold as lions! Soon as the banns was out, they was marr-ried in the parr-rish church: an' then they went off saycretly, nowan knawed where—or, laysteways, nowan that cared to tell. I see'd them the same night, 'tes true, but through a' accident. I happened to have worked round agen to Poljew, an' was out slaipin' in me van on the bit o' downses³ thereabouts, an' I heerd a cart goin' by in the dead o' the night: so I peeped out an' I see'd Polly settin' there in the cart humped up on the sait weth a shawl around her shoulders an' the li'l

¹ Spurting.

² Front door.

³ Downs.

palchy¹ schoolmaster settin' 'longside her; an' cryin' she was, that bitter as ef her heart wed break."

"Ded'ee spaik to her?"

"No, you, I dedn'," said the pedlar.

"I shud like to knaw how it all ended," said the youngster, whose appreciation of the rulling, as a bit of revenge, was somewhat spoiled by the practical results of it.

"Well, sonny, tha's all I knaw of it," said the pedlar. "She had her way, had Polly—bein' so high-sperrited—an' she got a sore heart ovver it, simminly. So—temper or no—the rullin' done its work somehow."

"Iss, Tom got his fun," said the youngster, unconvinced: "but the schoolmaster he got the girl all the same."

"Well, now, how about thy awn affair?" quoth the pedlar. "Who'll'ee git to help'ee? Le's git on to that." And he thereupon dragged the youngster headlong (so to speak) into discussing the scheme and how best it could be carried out.

As soon as they heard of the proposed "bit of fun" others of the "cove chaps" agreed to join in, till presently half-a-dozen were banded together to see it through.

But as the plot advanced from nebulous talk and frothy discussion towards the practical issues of when and where it was to be carried out, the courage of the youngsters wavered and their hearts began to fail them.

Though it was not exactly in this way that they explained it to themselves, they were daunted by the strength of the schoolmaster's personality, by the latent power that he impressed them as having at his command, and by their fear of the unknown—that bugbear of the peasant mind—fear of the uses he might make of the social life and the social forces that he was presumably in touch with through his education and his position generally. They were afraid of what he might do to them through the Wesleyan minister and the parson, and, most of all, through the mysterious "*Lan*" and its effective agent the policeman. "'Tes darned risky to meddle with a man like he!" they agreed, wavering.

¹ Weak or sickly.

At this juncture, looking around for further confederates, they bethought them of the young fellow whose proposal to Morvenna to be her shiner had precipitated matters with the schoolmaster earlier in the year. It was known that Dick Laity had been "geeking after"¹ Morvenna, and the youngsters surmised that he would join in their scheme against the schoolmaster with a malicious relish as keen as their own.

But Dick, when he heard of it, was on fire with indignation. He would take no part in it: he would rather lose a limb first!

The lad had really loved Morvenna—loved her still, though he had lost her. Indeed, Morvenna—now he felt her lifted out of his reach by her public engagement to a man like the schoolmaster—was, to Dick, something to be thought of with the shy, hidden fondness with which a lad here and there (and oftener than we give them credit for) will treasure up the memory of his first taste of sentiment. Dick would not be a party to the humiliation of Morvenna's hopes, or to the least affront to the happiness she evidently had found for herself, even if the indignity might have resulted in his gaining her for himself in the end. The lad had no command of language to find phrases for this feeling of his; but the feeling was in his heart: and he acted up to the promptings of it.

As soon as he heard of the plot, Dick hurried to Ezekiel and told him all about it: and then asked him to warn the schoolmaster, as he didn't like to do it himself—the lad feeling a delicacy in broaching bluntly to an educated man a subject that necessarily must be so offensive to him.

Ezekiel thanked Dick heartily, but was greatly angered at the news. He was in the middle of his tea, but he at once rose from the table, leaving the meal unfinished. Clapping on his hat, he tramped off heavily to the other cottages in the row to inform the fathers of the youngsters of the contemplated outrage.

¹ Looking after: used also as an equivalent for "trying to make up to."

The other men were quite as wroth as Ezekiel: their respect for the schoolmaster, and their liking for little Morvenna, making them view the proposed insult with the angriest disapproval.

The youngsters were accordingly informed by the men that, if they attempted to carry out the plot, or to molest the schoolmaster in any way, they would be thrashed unmercifully by the men of the cove, and afterwards would be "summoned" (every one of them!) by the schoolmaster: their own fathers pledging themselves to give evidence against them.

The youngsters—enraged on the surface, though secretly relieved in their hearts—would make no promises, in view of the threats thus launched at them. But all of them felt that the plot was now as good as dead and buried; and they accordingly contented themselves by arranging to "pay out" Dick Laity by giving him a "good larruping"¹ at the earliest opportunity.

[This intention—it may be here stated, in passing—they carried out, about a week later, to their entire satisfaction. Dick defended himself manfully, alone though he was, but before he managed to escape he had received a bad black eye and had had a couple of his front teeth knocked down his throat. He, however, kept the dastardly attack a secret. He seemed to think that, in a way, he had deserved it by "splitting on them"; and he felt also that (vicariously) he was paying the forfeiture for Morvenna's sweetheart: an idea which, so far as he was able to grasp it (and this was merely as a sentiment and not as a matter of phrasing), afforded him a secret satisfaction that he chewed the cud of for weeks.]

¹ Good thrashing.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE HEART OF A GIRL

MORVENNA, on hearing of the contemplated attack on her sweetheart, was thrown into a state of the greatest excitement.

"I'll go up and tell him myself!" she cried anxiously to her father. "I *must* go up, father! He'll take it better from me, I know."

"Iss, le' the cheeld go! she's right there," remarked Malva. "'Tis an insultin' thing to say to un: but he'll take it all right from *she*."

So Morvenna hurried on her things and set off up the valley at a speed that was more like a run than a walk.

The schoolmaster was strolling leisurely in the shadow of the hedgerows, his hands behind his back and a pipe in his mouth, and was greatly surprised at seeing Morvenna coming running towards him so excitedly.

"What's the matter, my pet?" he cried anxiously, pocketing his pipe and hastening towards her.

Morvenna threw herself into his arms, and, laying her head on his shoulder, burst into a sudden hysterical fit of weeping.

"What is it, my sweet?" he asked, with tender solicitude. "What has happened?—Come! tell me, my darling!" he continued coaxingly: kissing her on her lips, and on her eyes, and on her wet, girlish cheeks; his arms, the while, folded around her protectingly.

Morvenna sobbed out her tale, brokenly and almost gaspingly: her voice half choked with tears, and her heart throbbing under her bodice, till he could feel it jumping against his side with quick, panting leaps that distressed him unbearably.

"Never mind, my pet!—Yes, yes, my sweetest!—It'll be all right, little one!—Come, come, my darling, you mustn't take it so to heart!" were some of the soothing exclamations

with which he tried to quiet her, as he kissed her quivering little lips and fondled her to him lovingly.

"But . . . but, dear . . . I can't bear the thought of it!" sobbed Morvenna. "It's so wicked! so cruel! Oh, my dearest, they *shan't* do it!" And she clung to him excitedly: as if to protect his body with her own.

"No, no, my darling! it will be all right, you'll find. They may talk—but they won't venture to attempt it!" remarked the schoolmaster. And she was aware of a note in his voice that she had never heard there before. She had caught foreshadowings of it occasionally when he addressed some refractory scholar, but the full resounding strength of it, its ring of confident masterfulness, she had never before been thrilled by: and her heart rose in response to it. It was not only the quality, it was the pitch and intensity of the note that thrilled her: and the strength of it quieted her with the consciousness that she was in the arms of a very *man*!

She looked up at him with a deep trust and a tender love that were really beautiful.

"Oh, my dearest, how I love you!" she cried, clinging to him confidingly.

"It is love for love, little one! You have all mine!" said the schoolmaster tenderly.

"I know it! I know it!" cried Morvenna, kissing him shyly. "And oh! I'm *so* glad of it! *so* proud of it, dear!" she whispered.

She would leave the future in his hands trustfully: feeling assured that he would come triumphantly out of any, and every, ordeal. This was a *man* that she was in love with: and to her all things seemed possible to him.

They walked down to the cove together through the moonlit beauty of the September night; and when the schoolmaster finally handed over his little sweetheart to her mother, the girl's heart was as full of happiness as a rose in its prime is full of perfume. And his good-night kiss to her on the cottage doorstep sent her to bed with the sweetest of dreams.

That the malicious plot against her lover ended only in smoke, Morvenna never credited to the combined action of her old friends in the cove, or to the youngsters' secret fear of the law and its agents. She put it down, joyously and triumphantly, to the manhood of her lover: to the skulking cowardice of the plotters when they thought of confronting a veritable man!

The passion of her heart was not only its pride, it was its most precious thing as well. Her love had received its consecration: and closer than it was now to the hidden springs of her nature, it was doubtful if it could ever be—even when she was a wife. It might be richer in her blood then, when she was fashioning for a mother; but, as a shaping power in her thoughts and ideals, it was probably now at its height.

CHAPTER XIX

ILLUSION AND DISILLUSION

THE crabbing season, now drawing to a close, had been for Ezekiel a most unsuccessful one. He had done the worst of any of the crabbers in the cove: a result of which he firmly believed his sin to be the cause.

There were times when Malva had been so sorely straitened that she had been tempted (almost to the point of yielding) to take some of the money out of the teapot. But she was a loyal wife: and would not do anything that she thought would harm Ezekiel. And she was as afraid of the money as if she believed that the coins were actually "ill-wished," and therefore were bound to bring misfortune and possibly ruin to the spenders of them.

Sometimes for more than a week there had not been in the cottage a bit of fresh meat; and, on two distinct occasions, they had to do without sugar and butter as well. Even Morvenna, young and healthy as she was, had once

or twice shown signs of the sharp pinch in the cottage: and the schoolmaster, watching her with the keenness of love, began to have his suspicions as to the possible reason for her strange fits of lassitude. He accordingly made it a rule to propose a jaunt of some kind at every reasonable or convenient opportunity. The Saturday afternoons were now regularly granted to him for the full possession of Morvenna's leisure, and at such times he usually took her to Penzance. Here he could always manage that they should have refreshments in one of the better-class eating-houses: and he was careful to see that the refreshments were as appetising and as substantial as his rather scanty means would permit. Nor did he ever bring Morvenna back from one of these jaunts without insisting on her taking home a present for her mother: now half a pound of tea, now a dozen fresh eggs; once or twice it was a chicken; and occasionally it was a rabbit, or a plump young duck. At first, Morvenna, shy and doubtful, had tried to object: but the schoolmaster claimed the right (he said to Morvenna fondly) to be to her mother, even now, the son he was to be to her in (so many) months—*nineteen, eighteen*, or whatever the actual number might be—the lovers counting off the months as if they were milestones on the road to Paradise. So Morvenna, loving him too whole-heartedly to mistrust his motives for a moment, yielded the point obediently and with a pretty grace that delighted him: getting her payment on the way home in the shadow of the hedgerows, where the schoolmaster kissed the colour into her cheeks more than once. The precedent thus established, the schoolmaster took good care that it should not become obsolete: so that finally it came to be looked upon as quite a settled thing. On his own account, he always took Ezekiel some tobacco, which, also, he had established a prescriptive right to have accepted. And in this way he was able, without thrusting it on them offensively, to help Malva and Ezekiel (very slightly, it is true; but, then, he would have done more for them had he dared) in some of the darkest hours that they had known in their

married life. As a consequence, Morvenna almost worshipped her lover. She was so proud of him—not with the vulgar pride of ostentation, but with the deeper pride that hugs the treasured secret to the heart—that he filled her thoughts almost from morning till night, and went in and out of those sleeping thoughts or memories, her dreams, as freely and as freshly as the sea-air and the sunshine went in and out of the humble little cottage.

Drusilla often laughed (though not, now, so maliciously) at Morvenna's overbrimming love for the schoolmaster; which the girl could by no means disguise, though she tried to. But Morvenna was too happy to mind a little teasing, and too sweet-natured to resent it at any time. Once a week, regularly, Drusilla came down to see her mother: Malva finding the walk to Choone bottoms and back, a more tiring jaunt than she altogether cared for. On this weekly visit, Morvenna always walked back to Drusilla's cottage with her: sometimes meeting her sister returning as she herself was coming from school, but more often finding her still down with Malva, the two gossiping together cosily over a quiet cup of tea.

These weekly walks to Drusilla's cottage were the sisters' great time for such confidences as they indulged in, and Drusilla could not help feeling a little envious of her sister, when she contrasted Morvenna's deep, confiding happiness with her own disappointments and grievances against Joe.

Determined to find in her own memories some parallel to this gladness—on the principle that our possessions and experiences prove to demonstration that we are the microcosm we think ourselves; and that neither in memories, or in knowledge, are we worse off than our neighbours—Drusilla had to fall back on the reminiscences of her first courting. That girlish experience with Robert Pengelly was her first taste of sentiment: and it remained still the sweetest; as she frankly admitted to herself.

Having once started piquing these old memories into life, in order to contrast them with and measure them

against Morvenna's, Drusilla began to find the game a strangely fascinating one: the element of danger that she was aware of in it, being part of its piquancy.

The remembrance of moonlight strolls and of long sweet talks in the shadow of the hedgerows, of hot cheek pressed against hot cheek passionately, and of lips that clung together with a hunger that seemed insatiable—these were by no means a diet that a woman like Drusilla could venture to feed upon too often and too greedily.

In spite of the expectancy of motherhood which kept her pulse dancing, the lingering over these memories became perilously pleasant to her; and the thought of Robert Pengelly with his arm around her, and with her head resting on his shoulder as it had done when she was a girl, became so familiarised to Drusilla's imagination that, if she had suddenly waked up from one of these reveries and had found the miller's arm actually around her waist, it is doubtful if she would even have pretended to be surprised.

The miller, however, after his failure to get a kiss from her at the wedding-supper—a rebuff to which both of them had attached a significance not apparent on the surface—had not troubled to put himself often in her way. He spoke to her, it is true, when he met her, and sometimes chatted with her for a minute or two; once he had called at the cottage to give Joe a forgotten order; and once he had talked with her at the garden-gate for perhaps five minutes. But this fragmentary intercourse (if one wished to find a reason for it) might be considered due to Drusilla living now on the high-road—a route the miller was frequently traversing in attending to his affairs—and to her husband coming and going daily between the cottage and the mill, which were distant from each other barely ten minutes' walk. In the cove, Drusilla was so entirely out of the miller's world that, to see her there and chat with her, it would have required that he should have sought her of deliberate purpose. Here, so close to the mill, and in the very highway of his daily life, he could pass and chat with

her as an acquaintance as often, practically, as he chose. That he met her so seldom, under the circumstances, and chatted with her so indifferently, seemed to prove . . . but why should she seek to make it prove anything? Why should he remember their old courting days? Or, why should *she*, for that matter? He was nothing to her (of course not!) now she was a married woman. And she was nothing now to him: or, at least, only his old sweetheart. She had become the wife of his waggoner, and must content herself with that.

Yet—and here was the critical point of the situation—supposing she were not content, and, what was more, would not try to be?

Here was Joe treating her with the grossest selfishness, and with a want of courtesy so glaring—seeing how young and new a wife she was—that he hurt her vanity almost every hour of the day. And the pretty coaxing ways in which she would have liked to be petted, were simply conspicuous by their absence, so far as her husband was concerned. Indeed, there was nothing but the satisfaction in her blood to bring her gladness. And, even for Drusilla, this was not quite sufficient. The woman's nature was not unlike the outward mask of it. The well-rounded bust, the luxuriance and softness of the hair, the easily coming blushes, the love of fondling and being fondled, they all had their share in the warm abundance that so agreeably characterised it. But there was in her, as well, a kind of hungry sensibility—at least, on certain sides, where she was as flexible as she was vain—and a keen appetite for pleasure (as far as her conceptions of pleasure went) that was always urging her along the lines where the satisfactions of it might be looked for. To glance at her face, with its sensuous feminine attractiveness, was to many men to be tempted (almost daringly) to kiss it: the latent note and the underlying hints of the features seeming to suggest that the temptation would be met more than half-way.

As the schoolmaster, when Morvenna was at Drusilla's cottage, always came to fetch her and to take her home,

Drusilla saw more of him now than she had ever seen before. And when he came for Morvenna, he was so courteous and tender towards her, as if she were something exceedingly precious to him, that Drusilla was frankly envious of her sister: not exactly wanting Morvenna's sweetheart for herself, but wishing, at any rate, that she had gained one like him.

Drusilla tried to imagine her sister as the schoolmaster's young wife, and she thought how tenderly, lovingly proud of her he would be. It made her heart sore (as well as envious) to think of the contrast between such a life and her own. She wanted to be treated as she knew Morvenna would be treated under the circumstances: wanted to be petted, caressed lovingly, wrapped round in every fondling way, with the proud tenderness of a man who could fill a woman's thoughts with gladness as easily as the most selfish of them could fill her veins with fire.

To expect that Joe would ever quicken her life with such happiness, she knew now was to expect a thing frankly incredible.

How, then, could she be content! She simply would not try to be.

If she had married Robert Pengelly when the wine of youth was in their veins, such happiness might have been possible for her—would have been hers beyond a doubt! And even if, at the present moment, she were the miller's wife, instead of Joe's, surely the fire of passion would burn through them as it used to do! she would know what it was to be glad and to leap with pleasure, *not* in one way only (and that the cheapest) but in all!

When Joe told her he had asked for a rise and the miller had refused him, Drusilla was at first angrier in the *secret* theatre of her thoughts than she was in the open-air world of her daily interests. She thought, surely the miller, if he cared anything for her, might have done her this small kindness and have been none the worse for it. But when Joe went on to tell her of the miller's suggestion that he should emigrate, she fancied she saw here the tentative first move

towards an understanding: a sign that his interest in her had awakened, and that he wanted to clear the way to her.

She did not resent the idea in the least. On the contrary, she welcomed it with a shiver of delicious fear. To be besieged, however hotly, was not necessarily to surrender. After all, if they *should* drift into a flirtation, she would be no worse than other women—scores of them, probably. Besides, Robert was no stranger. Had he not kissed her before, and been the first one to do so? His right to her lips, in the Court of Sentiment, seemed to be quite as great as Joe's.

It was a perilous point to argue: but she argued it out to her satisfaction. She decided that she was not afraid, and was ready for the attack.

Of this mood of Drusilla, Morvenna caught occasional glimpses. But only on the side of its restlessness and discontent, and its hunger for something that (so far) it had failed to attain. That her sister's thoughts turned towards the miller with such a flush of hot passion in them, Morvenna was entirely ignorant of, and would not have believed had she been told of it. None the less, she considered it dangerous for a woman like her sister to be so persistently belittling her husband and asserting that she was disappointed in him. And once Drusilla (though in this instance she had no concealed meaning) had made a remark about the schoolmaster that Morvenna frankly did not like: exclaiming hotly, on finding him kissing Morvenna at the door, "Thee seem to find them so good, Morvenna, I shud like to have wan to sample! Wish I cud git such a lovely lot as thee do!"

"For shame, Drusilla!" Morvenna had said to her, greatly scandalised.

"Why '*for shame*'? Where's the shame of it?" quoth Drusilla. "I said, I shud like to sample them: iss! an' I shud—there now!"

"For shame, Drusilla!"

"Well, 'tes the truth, anyway," insisted Drusilla.

But Morvenna, though she was silent, retained her opinion all the same.

CHAPTER XX

A LONELY MAN

THE last Saturday in September, Ezekiel took up and brought in his crab-pots.

It was a wet, squally, cloudy day; there was a treacherous, shifty disquiet in the sea; and the thin driving spray was being blown about freely. Everywhere the world was full of querulous unrest: not the menacing sound and motion of a gale, but the shrill whistling and hooting clamour of the squall, and the brief spurts of its cloud-chasing, wave-troubling bluster.

The rain crackled against the window-panes of the cottages in the cove as the gusts drove the sudden showers peltingly against them, and the great swooping rush of the wind across the valley made the women-folk congratulate themselves that they were safe indoors: the occasional hooting in the chimney, the dreary whooping across the roof, the loud angry rattling of the windows and doors, the flames spurting from the turf fires and the smoke puffing out thickly, all accentuating indoors the turmoil and bluster that prevailed without.

Out in the bay, Ezekiel's little boat was tossed up and down on the short, choppy waves with a motion that, from the shore, looked most perilous to its occupant. But the crabber had weathered in her rougher and wilder days than this, and he worked his way to his "strings" of pots, one after the other, not as rapidly, but still as steadily, as if it were a windless day in June.

Ezekiel had about sixty pots "down" in the bay—distributed in eight "strings," at as many different stations—and owing to the squalls, and the treacherous tumbling seas, he calculated that practically it would take him all the day to get in his pots and land them safe at the cottage. He could not venture to take in the boat, under the present

circumstances, more than about half-a-score pots at a time, and that would mean half-a-dozen journeys to and from the cove, with a troublesome landing on the beach at the end of each journey. He accordingly made up his mind for a hard day's work: indeed, if the morrow had not been Sunday, and the weather so unsettled and with a threat of worse mischief in it, he would have spread the task over a couple of days. As matters stood at present, however, to postpone the task was impossible. After a good deal of trouble, he had got a berth on one of the pilchard-drivers in Newlyn, and on Monday morning he must duly be on board to take his place. It was only because of his exceeding ill-luck, that he had kept his pots out up to the last moment like this. But, with times so hard as they were, he had to make the most of every opportunity. His Michaelmas rent was just due—it was a shilling a week, thirteen shillings a quarter—and though he could pay this out of Morvenna's quarter's salary, he had hoped this time to let her have the money for clothes, which she certainly needed now she had a sweetheart, and he a man like the schoolmaster. So deadly, however, had been the hostility of Fate, that, during the last few weeks, he had barely been able to keep food in the cottage, and to save money for the rent had been a sheer impossibility.

It was only a part of the payment that was to be wrung out of him, no doubt. But, none the less, he found the payment a hard one. And the exaction of it was characterised by a cruelty that made him wince.

Nearly six months had passed since the day of his sin, and, in the interval, Ezekiel had aged with extreme rapidity.

His hair and beard, which, on the afternoon of his temptation, were thick, if grey—as thick as those of a man of forty—were now white and thin, and the top of his head was almost bald. The wrinkles in his face, too, had increased almost tenfold; and the man had begun to stoop, and to hang his head so weakly, that his shoulders had curved over till they were rounder than a cobbler's. His very walk

had grown heavier, less elastic and weaker. Occasionally, too, he was aware of other disquieting symptoms: an odd weakness of his eyesight, which was sometimes unsteady, sometimes dim; moments of rigidity in the limbs, when he was strongly excited, or was startled suddenly; and a fluttering loss of self-control that at times troubled him to the pitch of fright.

He believed firmly in his mind that these changes were not natural, but were merely a part of the punishment he would have to suffer for his sin. And, under the weight of this belief, he staggered helplessly, and almost hopelessly, along the dreary road of life: with nothing to look forward to except the black pit of death—which he knew well waited at the end of the road for him.

Twelve months ago, Ezekiel had got a berth on a pilchard-boat without difficulty: he looked then hale and hearty enough to do his work with ease. But this year he had found things altogether different. It was only “by the skin of his teeth” that he had obtained a berth at last: and, even then, it was in a boat, and under a man, that twelve months ago he would scarcely have looked at.

Indeed, he looked so frail and, withal, so old, that it seemed to be quite possible that this would be the last season he would be accepted for the fishery: unless something of the nature of a miracle should happen, to stay the hands on the dial for him, or even turn them back. But the days of miracles, Ezekiel knew, were past. The great Miracle Worker had long ago been tortured to death on Calvary, and no one now would work a miracle to gladden a sinner, even if it were possible.

He must endure his doom, and the gloom of it, as best he could.

If, only, others might not suffer for the sin as well as himself!

As he rowed from one “string” of pots to another, Ezekiel’s heart seemed to be as cold and as heavy as the stones with which the dripping crab-pots were weighted. And his trips to and from the cove, with the boat loaded

with the empty pots, were performed with the dreariest lack of interest imaginable.

Rarely had he known a season in which he had had worse luck : and never had he closed a season more dispiritedly.

He wondered whether that "other man" were dogged with misfortune as *he* was. And he wondered, also, how much (or how little) his fellow-sinner felt the burden of the wrongdoing that had separated them from their kind.

Could he see that "other man," if only for a moment, Ezekiel thought it would ease his heart : he would feel less solitarily accursed. Yes ! on the day that he should meet him in the flesh, Ezekiel almost fancied that he might even be glad.

As he made his way from "station" to "station," and from these to the shelter of the cove and back again, he was so drenched by the driving spray and the sudden heavy showers, and so beaten and buffeted by the vehement gusty squalls, that, in spite of his sou'wester and his suit of oil-skins, Ezekiel felt wet and cold all over. His fingers were almost numbed into lifelessness by handling the wet lines and the dripping crab-pots : and the boat had always a pool of water gathering between the foot-boards, owing to the rain and the spray and the leakings from the pots ; so that every time he reached the shore and landed his shipment, he had to bail out the boat before he could start again.

It was tiring work for an ageing man, enfeebled and alone : and Ezekiel found himself thinking how different things might have been if his two sons now were alive to help him. They would have been men by this time ; perhaps might have been married like Drusilla. But then, they would have been *sons* ! they would have been bread-winners like himself : and all, in any case, could have worked together and helped each other. No doubt, whatever had happened, they would have been kind to little Morvenna. The "piggy-widden" of the family, and that a girl, they would have been as proud of as most brothers were, in decent families. And then . . . *then* . . . that sin of his would never have been

committed! There would have been no temptation to assail him—with her brothers kind to little Morvenna. And without the temptation in that form. . . . He sighed heavily and dismally.

The weary “might have beens” of life—what tragedies lie behind them! The agonies of hell, it is possible, may be more poignant: but more hopelessly, drearily sad they cannot be.

From mournful thoughts like these, he fell naturally to musing on the drowned man he had abandoned. The man who had thrust his dead body under the crabber's notice, that Ezekiel, in his brotherly kindness, might reclaim it for humanity: might snatch it out of the maw of the unquiet sea that had murdered him and give it burial in the quiet earth, where its brothers slept in peace. In that hour of temptation, however, the crabber had been without mercy. He had abandoned the body carelessly to the monster that had murdered it: *but* its treasures he had secured and had retained for his own uses.

Yes! they were robbers both of them. The sea had robbed him of his life: and Ezekiel had robbed him of his money. Which ought he to hate most, and with the deadliest malignity?

It was a question Ezekiel had puzzled over, in a dim and helpless way, hundreds of times since that fatal afternoon.

That the dead have power to molest the living—to injure them, if not openly, on the public highway and in the market-place, at least, in the secret and hidden byways of life—Ezekiel believed firmly: he had never for one moment doubted it. And, vaguely in his mind, he had the conception of the devil and the dead man, and Fate as their minister, watching him day and night tirelessly and pursuing him relentlessly: pursuing him with unresting feet that only God Himself could stay.

He looked abroad, and the world seemed as though gloomed over with his secret anxieties. Great dusky cloud-shadows had begun to move darkly across the troubled plain of waters, and against the slate-grey sky and the

leadens-grey sea the gulls (drifting along in the track of a sun-ray) seemed like drifting flakes of foam—their wings whiter than milk. Then a huge mass of rain-clouds came sailing up rapidly, and, in a space measured by seconds, had entirely blotted out the sky. The outer march of the Channel was now dabbled all over with white dancing wave-tops, thicker and whiter than a flock of gulls. Almost immediately, the gusts of wind began to lengthen and strengthen, and a sudden fierce squall swept blusteringly across the bay, filling the air with its strenuous commotion. Down beat the rain with a tempestuous rush and gush—a pelting, stinging onslaught that almost blinded Ezekiel—and then, of the hurrying cloud, but just now so huge, nothing seemed to be left but a few shreds and tatters that melted away, vanished mysteriously, and once more out came the sun.

The deep, melancholy cry of the sea now again filled the air without rival or pause: the ceaseless gusty whistling of the wind, and even the heaving tolling of the bell on the Runnelstone, seeming, by comparison, infinitely less impressive.

Hour after hour, the loneliness and savagery of the scene seemed, if possible, to deepen and to be accentuated menacingly. And to and fro, through the tumbling seas, Ezekiel toiled with his loads of crab-pots, till his fingers were numbed and stiffened cruelly by the stinging rain and the cutting blasts, and the blood in his veins chilled almost as drearily.

Presently, however, about half-an-hour before sunset, Ezekiel got the last load of pots in his boat, and turned her head homeward with a sense of deep relief.

The cliff-fronts and ledges were crowded with gulls and cormorants; and even on the skerries, where the impetuous, rushing swing of the waves made a jabble of water whose white turmoil was almost appalling, the herring-gulls and shags were congregated in clusters. The rocks, the faces of the cliffs, the boulders on the beach, were edged and dabbled over with yeasty clumps of foam; and on the

beach, at the edge of the breaking waves, long thick swathes of this blubber-like drift lay shaking tremulously in the tireless wind. A few gulls were still pecking along the sands, and the air was full of brine and of the keen tang of the seaweed. It was just such an evening as Ezekiel would have relished greatly, years ago. But to-day its fret and turmoil made him doubly querulous. He was wet and cold and tired : he felt old and feeble and depressed.

He was glad the season was over : he wished it were the last season he would have to toil through.

He longed hungrily, almost savagely, for Death to lay its hand on him. Then would he be healed with the deep healing that only Death has the skill of : then would he be quieted with the great peace there is none but Death can give.

CHAPTER XXI

SIDELIGHTS

THERE was a heavy storm all day on the Sunday, but by midnight it had entirely blown itself out. By the time Ezekiel was astir on the Monday morning, the sun was just rising in a blaze of dazzling splendour, and the world was full of the refreshing sweetness and the sense of exquisite cheer that follow after a storm at the beginning of autumn. The wind and the rain had swept over everything, but they had left the valley still green and with a touch of its summer bravery, and with an echo, if no more, of its old ravishment of song. Among the thorn-trees near the stream the robins sang briefly, the finches made a breezy lilt of music in the furze-brakes, and where the great ripening flag-pods (now turning brown) rose above the thinner shafts of the rushes the *chit, chitty, chit!* of the little sedge-warbler was repeated over and over garrulously, as if the bird would never tire. The swallows were twittering as they wheeled across the valley, their steel-blue backs

glinting in the sunshine, and the skylarks sang and sang again blithely, their rippling gaiety—like the sparkles of sunlight on the grass-blades—seeming to emphasise the delicious buoyancy of the mood to which, however temporarily, Nature had returned.

When Ezekiel, with his provision-bag and his sea-boots slung across his shoulder, started for Newlyn about eight in the morning, Morvenna also set out with him. She had arranged to accompany him to the head of the valley (where the turnpike-road met the lane leading to Polurrian), and then turn back and hurry on to school, which she would still be able to reach at her regulation time.

Isaac Roscorla was at his cottage door smoking his pipe, when Ezekiel and Morvenna, with Malva in the rear, came out on the doorstep just as the clock was striking eight. Isaac, though he was about two years older than Ezekiel, looked the other's junior by half-a-dozen years, and, as he stood here smoking this September morning, Malva wished her man were as fortunate as his neighbour. For Isaac had a couple of sons on the fishing-boats, and with their assistance, and his own modest success in the past, he had been able to give up going on the great fisheries of the bay for the last four or five years—to Malva's secret envy.

"Off, then, 'Zekiel?" quoth Isaac, between his puffs.

"Iss, you: no help for it," replied Ezekiel.

"Well, good luck to'ee!"

"Thaank'ee!" said Ezekiel.

"Still, I'm sorry 'tes so," added Isaac sympathetically as he glanced at the white hair and beard and the bent shoulders of his old neighbour. "Look as though thee want rest more'n I do."

"Iss, faather's failin' badly," remarked Malva sorrowfully. "He do want rest more than any o' we: 'tes whisht to see how fast he's ageing. But rest he caan't have, simminly," she added: "such poor luck as we do git in thaise days."

Isaac shook his head: but made no remark. The money spent on Drusilla's finery, and on her subsequent wedding, would have been much better saved against such times as

these, he thought. Having never had a daughter, he had little sympathy with girls, the queer "run" of whose nature he had almost forgotten in the course of years—so far distant in the past lay the days when he went courting and had tried timidly to feel his way to the secrets of a girl's heart.

"Well, good mornin' to'ee, Isaac!" said Ezekiel, nodding to his old neighbour.

"Good mornin'! an' good luck to'ee!" repeated Isaac, waving his hand.

And, with that, Ezekiel set off, with Morvenna at his side.

As they were walking up the lane, they saw the schoolmaster standing at his garden-gate quietly enjoying his after-breakfast pipe.

"If you will wait three minutes for me, I'll walk up with you, if you'll let me," he remarked to Morvenna and her father, when he heard whither they were bound.

Morvenna glanced at her father, her delight visible in her eyes.

"Iss, sir, we shall be glad o' thy company," replied Ezekiel.

"Come in and pick a few flowers for yourself, Morvenna!" said the schoolmaster, inviting them into the little garden. And with that he hurried indoors to get his hat.

"That's right, Morvenna! You look real bonny with that in your bodice!" he remarked, smiling into the girl's blue eyes, as he emerged from the cottage and found her with a spray of honeysuckle in her dress. "And, now, before we start," said he to Ezekiel, "let us fill up our pipes and make ourselves comfortable." And he produced a well-filled tobacco-pouch and handed it to the crabber.

Five minutes afterwards, they were on their way up the valley, the two men—with their pipes well-alight and drawing freely—tramping along one on either side of Morvenna; the girl walking between them elastically, with the blossoming honeysuckle in her bodice and with the sweet September sunshine (or was it something still sweeter?) dancing in her eyes as blithely as it was dancing in her heart.

Thick, dense patches of dwarf gorse (so crowded with

blossoms that the calyxes had scarcely room to open) lighted up the banks with their vivid belts of gold, and the lower slopes of the hills were so sheeted with heather that the millions of purple blossoms, massed together in the distance, left the impression that the hills were splashed with huge red stains. The vermilion of the countless haws, the misty purple of the sloes, and the glistening black of the great bunches of elder-berries, filled the hedgerows themselves with an effective wealth of colour, which, autumnal though its suggestions were, was still a pleasure to the eye. And all about the trio, as they walked up the valley, the martins were wheeling by scores, almost by hundreds: flying so low, and at the same time drifting so close to them, that Morvenna, as the birds darted to and fro in front of her, almost felt as if she could thrust out her hand and catch them easily.

It was a very pleasant walk; and though the talk was all on the surface, and drifted from one thing to another almost as aimlessly and irresponsibly as the martins wheeled and drifted around the talkers, still Ezekiel began presently to feel its very idleness as a relief; while the schoolmaster, having Morvenna at his side to talk to, found in that a sufficient happiness, and was as contented as he could be.

At last they came to the highway where Ezekiel had to leave them.

"Good-bye, father! I shall come to meet you on Saturday," said Morvenna, kissing his bearded face affectionately.

"Good-bye, me dear! Good mornin' to'ee, sir."

"Good morning, Mr. Trevaskis: and the best of luck to you!" said the schoolmaster heartily.

And off Ezekiel plodded, with his provision-bag and his pair of heavy sea-boots slung across his shoulders, and seeming almost to weigh him down.

Drusilla was standing at the door as Ezekiel approached her cottage, and, on seeing him, she at once came out into the roadway.

"Joe's goin' in to Newlyn fust thing this mornin': hope he'll meet'ee an' give'ee a lift," she remarked.

"It'll be all right, me cheeld: I can do the distance aisy."

"Still, a lift waan't do'ee no harm," said Drusilla, who was really sorry to see how worn and old her father looked, as he stood here with the sunshine on his thin white hair and his shoulders bending wearily under their weight. "Here! wait a minute! I'll put on me hat an' run round an' spaik to Joe." And she went in and fetched her hat, returning almost immediately; not, however, without a glance in the bedroom looking-glass, in order to see that she was presentable if she should chance to meet any one—the miller, or anybody else, she thought, smoothing down her apron.

Closing the cottage door behind her, she walked along with her father to the small belt of trees that rose ahead of them on the right-hand side of the roadway. The mill and the mill-house were hidden among these: but in a few minutes they were so close to them (so short was the distance) that they could plainly see the slated roof of the mill and the pigeons that were preening themselves on it in the sunshine.

Joe had just finished taking in a load of flour and was now receiving some last instructions from the miller; the two men standing at the tail of the waggon talking together.

When Drusilla explained to Joe that Ezekiel was tramping in to Newlyn and that she wanted Joe to give him a lift, the carter at once expressed his readiness to do so. And the miller, coming forward, called out heartily, "Iss, o' coorse! weth pleasure! Start to wance, Joe. Never mind that awther matter: anawther time'll do for that. Mornin', Mrs. Rosevear!" he added, turning to Drusilla.

"Good mornin', Mr. Pengelly," replied Drusilla, with her "company manners"; blushing vividly, however, in spite of herself. And she instinctively put her hand to her hat to straighten it.

"Here, Joe!" said the miller, calling the waggoner aside to the door of the mill. "Now's thy time, man! Thee waan't git a better chaance this side o' Chresmas. See ef

thee can git un in the mind to pay thy passage to America for'ee. Look here!" he added, in a sudden burst of generosity, the sight of Drusilla, in her morning freshness and with that blush on her face, having somehow set his pulse stirring strangely, "darned ef I waan't do'ee a kindness, man! Shaan't be the loser by it in the end, I do knaw. Ef thy faather-in-law 'ull give'ee ten pounds towards thy expenses, I'll advaance'ee five pounds out o' me awn pocket—there!"

"Es it a bargain?" said Joe.

"'Tes God's truth!" said the miller.

"Blest ef I don't tackle un, then!" Joe cried, excitedly.

"Right thee are! Thee'll never get a better opportunity. Make the most of it, man! Mind! ten from the owld man—an' then five pounds from me! Now, off thee go! Don't keep un waitin'. Comin' in to see the mill, Mrs. Rosevear?" he remarked to Drusilla. "Thee never seen it afore, b'leeve; have'ee?" he added.

"Iss, you," said Joe, flattered by the attention to his "missus," "take a look round now thee'rt here, Drusilla. 'Tes wuth seein': ef thee never see'd such a place afore."

Drusilla stood hesitating.

"Well, I don't mind ef I do, now I'm here. Good mornin', father!" she called up to Ezekiel, who was in the waggon.

"Good mornin', me cheeld! good mornin'!" said Ezekiel, nodding to her.

And out into the highway Joe drove, cracking his whip loudly.

When the waggon had gone, Mr. Pengelly took Drusilla into the mill and showed her over it with a lingering care, and with a close attention to her personal safety, that was just a little dazing and bewildering to her.

He pointed out to her the huge mill-stones grinding away noisily and making the floor shake with their heavy revolutions, and then he took her (so carefully!) up the steep stairway that led to the floor above, where the hoppers were located.

As he showed her the corn sliding with treacherous slowness through the hoppers—the yellow mass pouring steadily downwards towards the ponderous stones that they could hear grinding away so heavily under their feet—the miller held out his strong brown hand to grip hers, and to steady her as she nervously looked down into the hoppers. And Drusilla, bewildered and a little frightened by the noise and the strangeness, immediately surrendered her hand to his clasp; her pulse beating with an excited rapidity that he might interpret as he pleased.

The miller held her hand carefully until she had descended again to the floor where the great stones were revolving noisily, and then, as she drew it out of his with an apologetic timidity (as if unwilling to withdraw it with an abruptness that might offend him) she drooped her eyes and blushed hotly, turning away her face as she smoothed her apron nervously.

And, with that, into the miller's eyes there flashed something of the old restless fire that had filled them so often in the courting-days which he now remembered so vividly—remembered, hoping the while, as the memory gripped him disquietingly, that Drusilla remembered them as vividly as himself.

“ ‘Most like owld times, esn't it, Drusilla? ’ he ventured.

“ Don't knaw about that—'tes so long ago,” said Drusilla, her voice trembling, in spite of herself, as she leaned against some sacks. So strangely excited as she was she had not been for years: her eyes glittered and her cheeks were as full of colour as a girl's.

The miller, too, was aware of a peculiar disturbance and unrest. “ All this might ha' ben thine, ef we'd stuck to ayche awther,” said he.

Drusilla felt a sense of perilous pleasure that made her pulse leap strangely.

“ Iss, we ought to ha' made a match of it—thee an' me, Drusilla.”

“ But we dedn' : so there's a' end of it,” replied Drusilla shortly.

"I've regretted it sence—often!" said the miller gloomily. Drusilla remained silent.

He stood watching her face, in the dusk of the interior, till the womanly attractiveness of it made his blood sting him.

"Well, le' bygones be bygones between us—shall us?" said the miller.

"I don't mind," said Drusilla, still leaning against the sacks.

The shadows of the mill-chamber seemed to cut them off from the outer world. Drusilla stared at the floor, and the miller stared at her curiously.

"Thee've never shook hands weth me, Drusilla, not wance, sence we parted. Might do it now, to make it up," said the miller.

He held out his hand.

Drusilla did not advance hers.

"Waan't shake hands, waan't'ee?"

"Well, I don't knaw so much that I mind doin' that." And she gave him her hand, without lifting her eyes.

"Musn' ask for a kiss, s'pose, for owld acquaintance sake?" said the miller, still holding her hand in his: and he suddenly put his arm around her and kissed her full on the mouth.

Drusilla wrenched herself free from him and retreated to the door.

"Don't you try that agen, Mr. Pengelly!" she cried.

"'Tesn' the fust kiss we've had—we two," said the miller.

"Well, let it be the last, then," said Drusilla, denying nothing. And she backed to the door and out into the road.

"Arn't offended weth me, are'ee?"

"Good mornin'," said Drusilla; walking away hastily and without answering his question.

The miller did not attempt to follow her, but stood watching her out of sight, his face flushed hotly and his brain riotously full of thought.

"Lev' Drusilla ask her mawther—lev' her talk it ovver weth she. I got nawthin' to say in the matter. Le' me git down."

"But thee don't object, do'ee?"

"Lev' her ask her mawther. I got nawthin' to do weth it, I tell'ee! Le' me git down, will'ee!" and he rose from the seat. "Here! stop thy hosses! Le' me git down!"

Joe pulled up the horses and Ezekiel got down from the waggon, his legs shaking under him and his hands trembling violently.

"Well, we'll ask Mrs. Trevaskis, an' say thee towld us to, shall us?"

"Do what thee like—do what thee like! But drive on, man! drive on! an' le' me qua'at!"

Joe drove on, greatly perplexed in his mind, but, all the same, determined now to carry the matter through.

As for Ezekiel, dragging his feet heavily along the road, he moved down the hill towards Newlyn like a man dazed by a sudden blow, and staggering almost drunkenly under the effects of it.

He was slouching into Newlyn, with his lips trembling weakly and his eyes almost sunken into his head, when he met Tom the Hangman emerging smilingly from a cottage where he had just been selling some of his wares.

The pedlar's van was standing in the middle of the road, and Ezekiel, as he skirted it, met the pedlar face to face.

The misshapen little creature looked at the crabber curiously, with a queer, malicious twinkle in his beady black eyes.

"What! thee goin' on the boats agen, are'ee?" cried the pedlar, on seeing the crabber with his sea-boots and his provision-bag. "Shud ha' thought, by all accounts, thee done too well laast sayson to need it."

Ay, groaned Ezekiel inwardly, as he passed the pedlar without replying: I shall be a marked man soon—a Judas to them all!

CHAPTER XXIII

IN THE ENCHANTED WOOD OF MEMORY

WHEN Joe told him how easily he had succeeded with Ezekiel, the miller expressed his satisfaction with great heartiness. He advised Joe (as a friend) to make all his arrangements as promptly as he could, that he might be prepared to start at the earliest date possible. He also threw out the hint that, if Joe wanted an hour or two to go down with Drusilla to see her mother, he might have the hour or two that evening, and would be wise to seize the opportunity. "Take thy toll 'fore the mouth o' the sack es tied, man!" said he.

But Drusilla received the news in a vastly different spirit.

"Got a bit o' news for'ee, Drusilla," Joe had said to her, with assumed carelessness, as he was finishing his dinner.

"Good, or bad?" Drusilla asked him, with equal indifference; her thoughts having travelled far even during the dinner-hour.

"Tha's for *thee* to say, li'l woman, when thee hear it." And he paused to stretch out his legs, and to twist the ends of his moustache.

"Well, what es it?" asked Drusilla impatiently.

"I'm thinkin' o' goin' to America in a month or two," he remarked carelessly.

Having heard this kind of talk before, Drusilla did not trouble to reply to it.

Piqued by her indifference, Joe immediately began to swagger. "There esn' room in this owld country for a man to make 'es way, nohow. I want room to spread me elbows:" and he flung out his arms dramatically. "An' I mayne to git it, too," he added emphatically.

Drusilla leaned against the table, watching him intently.

"But where's the money to come from?" she asked him, still incredulous.

"Aw, that'll be arranged, aisily enough. Mester Pengelly es goin' to lend me five pounds: offered it to me without me askin' un; '*out o' respect for me?*' he said."

"Eh? He ded, ded 'a?" For a minute, her glance grew as vague as if her wits had gone wool-gathering. But she pulled herself together promptly. "Ayven five pounds waan't cover the expense," she remarked, as she watched the little man strutting up and down the kitchen.

"Well, thy faather have promised to advance us haaf-a-score as well."

"So thee've arranged it all, have'ee—thee an' the miller? An' poor faather es to be drained agen . . ."

"He got the money, thee towld me theeself."

"I ben a fool wance too often: an' now I'm payin' for it, s'pose."

"Fool, or no, the sack's of thy awn fillin', anyway. Wha's in it thee put there: for raisons o' thy awn, s'pose. Thee said he'd got the money: an' he dedn' deny it. An', wha's more, he was quite agreeable I shud have it," Joe insisted. "'*Tell her to go down to her wanther an' git it,*' he said to me twice ovver."

"I question ef he've got it to lend'ee, ayven ef he's willin'."

"Ef he ha'n't, I shall ha' to sell up the furniture, tha's all."

"Want to break up house, do'ee?"

"All depends upon circumstances," answered Joe coolly, as he swaggered up and down the kitchen with his thumbs stretching out his waistcoat.

"Ayven fifteen pounds wed be little enough to do it on," remarked Drusilla. "An' how am *I* to git on, 'tell you git in work an' begin to send to me? An' then there'll be the baby comin' an' the extry expense o' that."

"Gosh! now I never give a thought to thee!" said Joe. "Tha's a fact, li'l woman!" he added, smiling broadly, as if it were the best of jokes that he should have thought only of himself.

Drusilla bit her lip, and remained silent.

Joe continued strutting up and down, still smiling to himself.

"Well, thee must think of it now, then," Drusilla said impatiently. "How am I to live, an' pay the rent an' the doctor? It wed be a couple o' months, I 'spect, before thee'd be able to send to me. . . ."

"All o' that, I 'spect," replied Joe, carelessly.

"Well, then, thee must layve me money to go on weth," said Drusilla.

"We'll git the money from thy faather fust; an' I'll figure it out weth Mester Pengelly. Wan thing es sartin, an' that es—that I'm goin'!"

"Thee've made up thy mind to go, then?"

"Not a bit o' doubt about that!"

Drusilla watched him with critical closeness: reckoning up his character as she never had done before. But for that passion in woman whose burden she carried visibly, her contempt for him would have leaped out in words that would have scorched him. Had he been a woman, she would have eased her mind and showed her heart nakedly. But towards a man, and he her husband, the filaments of sex were astir strangely all through her nature.

She was reckoning up her married life—its few gains and its many losses; what it gave and what it took away—and she could not find it in her nature, even at this juncture, to be otherwise than glad that she had lived to be a wife. That the purchase was worth the price, she felt with the passion of a woman in every single drop of blood in her body. "It got nawthin' to do weth content," she decided in her mind. "'T'es the nature o' we wemmin to want to try marr-ried life. I wanted to try it: an' I've done so. An' I don't regret it, ayven now!"

As Joe was leaving the cottage, after dinner, he remarked to her roughly, "Mester Pengelly have offered me a couple o' hours' layve, an' I'm goin' to take it, an' we'll go down to thy mawther's 'bout tay-time an' all have tay together as sociable as can be."

Drusilla did not trouble to reply.

"Mind!" he insisted, "I shall be in by five o'clock: an' then we'll start off, right away, for thy mawther's."

"Very well," said Drusilla, still standing at the end of the table.

Joe went off tilting his head proudly in the sunshine and swelling in his clothes like an excited turkey-cock. "Tha's the way to manage wemmin!" he remarked to himself, with a satisfied smile. "Trust a woman for knawin' her master, when she do see un!" And, at this, the little man puffed out his stomach more and more, till his waistcoat suddenly burst open at the bottom—a couple of the buttons being jerked off into the hedgerows. "Darn the buttons!" he cried impatiently: and then solaced himself with the reflection, "Still, don't matter, she'll ha' to saw them on: 'tes 'most all they're fit for—finickin' things like that!"

Meanwhile Drusilla stood motionless beside the kitchen-table: seeing many matters in an aspect decidedly novel to her, and, perhaps for the first time since a woman's pulse had beat in her, judging herself as harshly as even an enemy could have done.

Presently she roused herself out of her reverie: a new expression on her face.

After washing-up the dinner-things and tidying-up the house, she went out to the garden gate and stood leaning thoughtfully across it, watching the hedgeless roadway that skirted the bottoms and the pedestrians who at intervals passed leisurely along it.

Presently she descried the person she evidently had been waiting for. The miller was coming along the road, his retriever at his heels.

On seeing her standing at the garden gate, he advanced towards the cottage with a strange expectancy in his eyes. He was flattered, and yet, in some way, a bit disappointed, at the sudden medley of thoughts that jostled together in his brain. When he had courted Drusilla, years ago, he had thought of her as a girl. . . . But, there, such is life! . . . All in good time, everything goes to the market. . . . And he walked up to the cottage gate with a step that

was almost jaunty, a peculiar smile gradually mastering his lips.

He was still a yard or two from her, when Drusilla flung at him the question, "What'ee mayne, you, by offerin' to lend Joe that five pounds?"

"Aw, well, thee knaw . . . between ourselves . . ." he began confusedly, the tone of her voice, as well as her manner, having taken him quite aback.

"Knew what? Spak out, man!" she demanded impatiently.

Her antagonism was so marked that the miller stared at her dumbfounded.

"Shall I help'ee out?" she asked, seeing him standing there silent. "In thy mind was it a sort o' payin' a man—a price, say, for *me*?"

The miller stood before her looking foolishly helpless.

"Ef I've offended 'ee, Mrs. Rosevear, I'm rayle sorry," he began haltingly; his big flat-topped fingers fumbling confusedly with his watch-chain. "I thought, seein', like . . . believin' as how . . . That es," he corrected himself, "we havin' ben sweethearts at wan time, Drusilla, an' I likin'ee, still, better than any awther woman . . ."

"An' me anawther man's wife!" interposed Drusilla.

"What have that got to do weth it?" he demanded, with a flash of passion.

"This much—that *I* all'ys remember it, Robert Pengelly! Anawther man's wife, mind! not a girl, not a single woman. Thee might ha' had me at wan time—but thee dedn' choose to . . ."

"More fool I!" rejoined the miller impetuously.

"An' now tha's ovver! No good goin' back on it, Robert Pengelly! Tha's ovver an' done weth—that es! Ovver an' done weth!" she repeated.

"Well, ef it es, an' ef I *was* a fool—as I knaw I was in they days—I tell'ee agen, as I towld'ee afore," he insisted, with passion, "that I like'ee, still, better than any awther woman!"

"An' I say agen," replied Drusilla, her face flaming, "that

this es between us all'ys!" And she put one of the fingers of her right hand on the finger with the wedding-ring on it: both hands resting on the top of the garden gate.

"Well, lev' it be so! That waan't alter my feelin's," replied the miller, almost querulously. "Maid or wife, 'tes all wan to me: here I am at thy heels still."

"An' what do'ee expect to git by it? Do'ee think I'll slip off *this* for'ee," she touched her wedding-ring again, "an' go through the world bare-fingered for folks to point at?"

The miller remained silent, biting the ends of his moustache.

"We've knawed ayche awther years, now," remarked Drusilla, facing him across the gate; "an' we was shiners when we was onnly boy an' girl, thee an' I . . ."

"Iss, tha's true! The fust girl I ever kissed was *thee*, Drusilla."

"An' the fust man I ever kissed was *thee*," responded Drusilla, as if she were unconsciously thinking aloud before him.

"But mind you," she added, with an emphasis he was compelled to take note of, "ef I thought thee wert tryin' to buy me as ef I was a good-for-nawthin', I'd rather stank¹ on thy face, as I stank on this grass here," and she struck her foot passionately on the grass border of the garden, "than I'd ever exchange a word weth'ee agen so long as I do live!"

The miller fumbled with his watch-chain and chewed the ends of his moustache nervously. He felt dazed—he felt confused—he was oddly bewildered. He looked straight into Drusilla's eyes: and as he looked there he was strangely moved.

"Well, Drusilla," he replied slowly. "I 'gree weth'ee that, after all, 'tesn' feer traytement of'ee. Thee've made me feel a bit ashamed—I tell'ee *that* feer an' oppen. But ef thee'll tell me what thee want, I'll do it, ef 'tes possible. Strike me dead, ef I don't!" he asserted emphatically.

¹ Stamp.

"Tell Joe thee back out o' that five-pound offer: say thee've changed thy mind—anything. Ef he want the money, lev' un arn it."

"It'll make me look small, an' sim a bit of a liar, waan't it?" said the miller, the awkwardness of his position now forcing itself on him.

"Well, as thee please," replied Drusilla, watching his face; her eyes plainly belying the pretended indifference of her tones. "Thee can look small before he, or before me: whichever thee please."

"Then, by God, it shaan't be before *thee*!" cried the miller. "That have settled it. I'll do it. I'll tell un I'll draw back."

Drusilla's eyes shone brilliantly: her face was full of hot colour.

"Thank'ee! I thought thee wed," she replied; her voice so low that it was like Morvenna's when she was whispering to the schoolmaster.

As the miller wished her "Good afternoon!" not daring to stay any longer, his voice unconsciously seemed to echo the vibrating *something* in hers that had been so distinctly noticeable in spite of her efforts to suppress it. And Drusilla, as he walked away with his dog at his heels, went into the cottage with a smile on her face that might frankly have been called charming.

CHAPTER XXIV

DAUGHTER VERSUS WIFE

WHEN Joe was leaving work that evening, the miller, haltingly and most confusedly, remarked to him that he "felt mean; as mean as chip broth. But he couldn't help himself. He had heard some news, since the post went round, that he hadn't even dreamed of—earlier in the morning. The fact was . . . he found he wouldn't be able, after all, to afford the five pounds that he had offered to lend Joe. He

was sorry—very sorry!—but he couldn't help himself: he wouldn't be able to manage it, really. Under the circumstances, it would be impossible. And Joe mustn't reckon on it, nohow."

"A nice hawl thee've landed me in, Mester Pengelly!" said Joe sullenly. "I ben an' made all me arrangements: dependin' on thy word, as ef 'twas gospel. I caan't back-out now, ef thee can," said he sulkily. "An' I waan't!" he jerked out, with a sudden vicious emphasis; thinking of Drusilla and her possible gloating over his disappointment.

Joe said nothing to Drusilla about the downfall of his plans in this direction, so that she was left in complete ignorance as to whether the miller had kept his word to her, or had merely been deceiving her, and had taken the opportunity to play her false.

All the time they were walking together down to the cove, Drusilla's thoughts were so engrossed by this aspect of the matter, that she paid very little attention to anything else: and she would willingly have given her best gown to have been assured, beyond doubt, that the affair had been settled as she desired *and as the miller had promised her*. She seemed to attach an importance almost morbidly exaggerated, to that significant proviso "as the miller had promised her": harping on it in her thoughts with almost wearying iteration.

It was the first attempt she had made since she had reached womanhood—the first effort with her whole heart and with the full strength of her nature—to exercise over a man the shaping power of proprietorship: and it seemed to her a vital matter that the attempt should be a success.

If it failed—the backbone of her energies would be broken. Never again (she assured herself) would her life recover its strength.

She might fall to anything—in her disappointment. It would demoralise her once for all.

She thought to herself that presently, when Joe asked for the money, he would probably make some reference to the miller's promise to him. If Joe failed to refer to the loan

(and he would be sure to boast of it, if he could) then she would know that the miller had faithfully kept his word to her: and then she would forgive him for the kiss he had stolen—and they would be friends—and all would be well.

The sun was setting by the time Drusilla and Joe got down to the cottage, and the schoolmaster, who had just brought Morvenna home from a walk, was kissing her “good night” in the shadow of the porch.

Morvenna, her arms around his neck, was drawing him to her closely; the schoolmaster clasping her lovingly, his arm about her waist. In fact, he held her so securely, that, as she hung on his neck, he had lifted her from the ground and held her up playfully, claiming yet another kiss before he would set her down.

On perceiving Joe and Drusilla, however, Morvenna coloured violently, crying, “Let me down, dear! I’ll pay you another time! Drusilla and her husband are behind you,” she whispered, close to his face.

The schoolmaster accordingly released her, and she ran indoors, blushing hotly: Joe and Drusilla, after exchanging “good nights” with the schoolmaster, entering the little kitchen close at her heels.

It was the first time Joe had been in the cottage since his marriage, and his unexpected appearance at such an early hour—at an hour, in fact, when he was ordinarily supposed to be at work—considerably surprised Malva and, indeed, somewhat alarmed her.

“Nawthin’ wrong weth Drusilla, es there?” she inquired anxiously.

“No! I’m all right, mother!” replied Drusilla cheerily.

Joe glanced at her, as if expecting her to explain the reason for their visit. But Drusilla had turned her back on him and was taking off her hat and jacket, remarking smilingly to Morvenna, “Playin’ out o’ school agen! Tha’s the second time I’ve caught ’ee!”

Morvenna blushed, and hung her head. “Still, it isn’t as if we were not engaged,” she remarked defensively.

"No, no; tha's all right, Morvenna. I done the same scores o' times, when I was a girl your age."

Morvenna smiled back at her happily. "One can't help it," said she: "can they?"

"No, no: 'tes in us."

And with this the whispering ceased.

Perceiving that Drusilla was determined not to help him out in any way, Joe explained to Malva that they had come down to take a cup of tea with her and to have a bit of talk about two or three matters. "But fust we'll have a feed, ef thee don't mind, Mrs. Trevaskis: it waan't be time wasted: we shall trot oover the road aisier weth our load in the end," he remarked, with a desperate attempt at joviality. "Come! gee up, Drusilla! Help thy mawther a bit, now!"

"No: lev' her rest!—Thee set down an' rest a bit, Drusilla!" said Malva. "Thee've had a long enough jaunt as it es, in thy condition. Thee'rt bra' an' tired, I'll be bound. Me an' Morvenna'll git the tay."

"Yes, you sit still, Drusilla!" added Morvenna. "You must play at being a visitor for once."

Presently, when they were all seated at the tea-table, and the conversation was moving a little, though still somewhat languidly, Joe remarked to Drusilla, "Now, li'l woman, le's hear what *thee* got to say! Thee got somethin' thee want to mention to thy mawther, b'leeve: ha'n't'ee?"

"Nawthin' special, that I knaw of," Drusilla replied indifferently.

"I thought thee'd got some kind o' message for her," prompted Joe, looking at his wife frowningly, but failing to catch her eye.

"Ef so, I don't knaw of it," rejoined Drusilla, sipping her tea coolly.

"That message o' thy faather's . . ."

"He never gov' me none, that I knaw of," persisted Drusilla.

Morvenna watched her sister curiously: and Malva looked from Joe to Drusilla, and from Drusilla back again to Joe, with a mingled perplexity and anxiety that Morvenna failed

to comprehend. To the mother, the dangerous nearness of a conflict between a man and his wife, where the jarring of wills was so pronounced and so stubborn as in this case, was an idea that insistentlly forced itself on her attention. As for Morvenna, however (unmarried and in love down to her finger-tips) the idea, at the moment, had not entered her mind.

"Darn it all! what'ee mayne by shyin' at it in this way? Out weth it, will'ee!" said Joe angrily to his wife.

"I've nawthin' to '*out weth*,' that I knaw of. Ef thee've a message—say it theeself."

Joe glanced at his wife with a look as black as a thunder-cloud. "Well, ef the wife es too bashful, s'pose I must deliver it meself," he remarked, with an indifferent attempt at a smile, addressing himself now directly to Malva. "Mester Trevaskis have agreed to lend us ten pounds . . ."

"Lend *thee*—I got nawthin' to do weth it," persisted Drusilla.

"Darn it all!" growled Joe, a menacing note in his voice: "thee'rt like a young filly weth the harness gallin' her; flingin' up her heels for everything or nawthin'. Keep qua'at, will'ee!"

Drusilla sat still and silent, her hands lying on her lap: while Morvenna watched the scene with her eyes dilating anxiously.

"Mester Trevaskis have agreed to lend us ten pounds, an' he said Drusilla was to come down to'ee and git it," said Joe sullenly.

"When ded 'a promise'ee this, Drusilla?" asked Malva of her daughter.

"I don't knaw no more about the matter than Morvenna do. Joe drove father in to Newlyn in his waggon this mornin', an' it do sim that, on the way, he asked father to lend un some money: an' accordin' to his account, father promised to do so. Promised to lend un ten pounds—accordin' to his account. Tha's all I knaw about it," said Drusilla. "An' 'tes more than I wanted to knaw, for that matter," she added, with a spice of temper.

"What do'ee want the money for?" Malva asked of Joe.

"Goin' to America!" said Joe defiantly. "I'm tired o' this owld world."

"Tired o' thy wife, too? Or was'ee thinkin' o' takin' she with'ee?"

"No: goin' to lev' her home for the present. I must find me feet fust; an' look around me a bit. Time enough to send home for she when I'm settled. That es, ef she keer to come out to me," he added carelessly.

"What do *thee* say about it, Drusilla?" asked Malva.

"What good'll ten pounds be to un?" replied Drusilla evasively: her heart beating violently as she propounded the question.

"Tha's true enough, too," rejoined Malva thoughtfully. And then, turning to Joe, "Ten pounds esn' much good: thee'd want nearer twenty."

"Well, the money I want I shall manage to git somehow." (Drusilla's heart began to dance. *He had kept faith with her! He had respected her trust in him!* And her eyes sparkled delightedly.) "Ef I caan't git it no awther way," Joe added sullenly, "well, I shall ha' to sell some o' the furniture."

"Drusilla's money bought that!" Morvenna interposed promptly. "The furniture is *yours*, Drusilla," said she, turning to her sister, "don't you let him meddle with it! It isn't fair nohow!"

"It do sim to me," said Malva to Joe, "the matter es a bit muddled. Better come down some Saturday when faather es home. Thee can talk the matter ovver better weth *he*."

"Then thee waan't gi' me the money? Ezekiel said I cud have it."

"If you want ten pounds so badly—work and earn it!" cried Morvenna. "Don't you let him have it, mother! I wouldn't, if I were you!"

Joe glared at her with an expression so savage that she rose from her chair in maiden anger. She was unused to being stared at, and glared at, in this way by a man.

"Do'ee want un to go, Drusilla?"

"That got nawthin' to do weth it," replied Drusilla.

"Then, are'ee *willin'* for un to go?"

"That got nawthin' to do weth it ayther, simminly."

"But *are* you willing, Drusilla?" Morvenna asked her, affectionately.

"Iss: lev' un go, ef he do want to," Drusilla answered.

"Well, thee know best what thee want," rejoined Malva.

"Ef *thee* don't, nowan do Thee must settle between theeselves, b'leeve," she added, with resignation.

Morvenna's heart was sore indeed for her sister. The situation, in its complexity, had in it elements of which she had no conception: and her understanding of it was practically limited to a perception of the pity and the probable pain of it as far as her sister was concerned. That Drusilla's heart was actually swelling with a secret unacknowledged happiness, Morvenna had no more idea of than she had of the geography of Jupiter.

"Ezekiel promised me the money, an' I ben buildin' on gettin' it," Joe began again, with dogged persistency.

"Well, let father himself tell us so!" said Morvenna, standing at her sister's side. "Surely, you can wait till Saturday to see him. You are not going off to America to-night, with your whip in your hand and your carter's frock on." The girl, spurred on by the defensive sentiment, felt as pugnacious as a little terrier.

Joe rose from his seat and stood in the middle of the kitchen. "You wemmin' arn't good for nawthin' but clack," he remarked boorishly. "I'd rather talk to a man, fefty times ovver!"

"When next you see father, *we* shall be here, too!" cried Morvenna, in her triumphant girlish defiance of him.

"Darn'ee, you li'l vixen! what'ee keep yappin' at me heels for! I got haaf a mind to fly-out an' kick 'ee out o' doors!"

"Thank you, Mr. Rosevear! but you will please remember it isn't usual to kick folks out of their own house!" The girl was so frankly delighted with what she considered as

her victory over him, that she felt as if she could dance around him to emphasise her triumph.

"I'm really sorry for you, Drusilla!" said Morvenna to her sister, affectionately, as the latter was leaving the cottage, about a yard in the rear of Joe.

"Iss? I dedn' quite catch what thee said," replied Drusilla, looking absent-mindedly into her sister's face.

"He's a brute—that's what he is! And I don't care if he hears me say it!"

"Aw . . . Joe? I warn't thinkin' of he," rejoined Drusilla.

"You were thinking of father, I suppose, Drusilla?"

Drusilla made no reply.

CHAPTER XXV

A MEETING ON THE MOOR

JOE's rebuff in Ezekiel's cottage rankled deeply in his mind. He was savagely determined to have his revenge for it: but the particular method of his revenge—or, rather, its particular moment—was something he could not so easily settle.

As a consequence of this mood of his, the relations between Drusilla and himself were considerably strained: a result Drusilla treated with complete indifference.

She recognised now—as a matter of feeling, rather than as a matter of thought—that Joe had entirely lost the power to injure her vitally. He might annoy her and might even make her nerves quiver, but the roots of her heart he was no longer able to touch—not even through the baby whose life she was quick with. She could fall back on hidden thoughts for her strengthening and refreshing: and, with these to sustain her, it was impossible for Joe entirely to crush her spirit.

Indeed, Joe was afraid to be too rough with her. The hope of getting from Ezekiel the loan he was so anxious for, acting as a secret curb on his inclinations: a curb that

he was compelled to acknowledge, though he chafed against it savagely.

He turned over and over in his mind, the various means he could think of for getting his own way and wreaking his will on everybody, but the sack of his fortunes was as empty as the devil's purse on a Sunday, and, stand it up as he would on the threshing-floor of his thoughts, it invariably collapsed and left him nothing to lean against. He was utterly powerless, in himself, to do the thing he had set his mind on. He must get outside assistance, as he now recognised clearly, or else he must be content to remain as he was *always*!

He passed two or three days in this state of fruitless irritation, till at last he was as spitefully restless as an ape.

But on the Friday something happened that freshened his hopes anew.

He was leisurely driving home from a lonely hamlet among the hills—one of the dreariest and most out-of-the-way collection of cottages to be found between St. Ives and Tol-pedn-penwith—and was puzzling muddleheadedly over the situation, when he perceived some distance ahead of him, on the windy moor, a van which he believed to be that of Tom the Hangman.

The rough cartway across the moor had to wind considerably, in order to avoid the enormous blocks of granite that were strewn among the gorse and heather by hundreds, and consequently some time elapsed (even after Joe had decided that it was a van and not a boulder) before he was near enough to the vehicle to be sure it was the pedlar's, and, of course, still longer before he was abreast of it.

All the time he was approaching the little weather-beaten van, Joe was considering nervously a somewhat daring suggestion that had flashed across his mind like a sudden glare of lightning. Should he consult Tom the Hangman—explain the circumstances to him and tell him what he wanted—and then . . . should he accept his assistance, if it could be had?

Over and over in his mind Joe turned the question—tried,

according to his ability, to look at it from every point of view—and, in the end, felt as bewildered as a cat caught in a mill-hopper and in danger of sliding down to the stones grumbling underneath.

As he came abreast of the van, Joe perceived that the little pedlar had set up a tinker's fire among the boulders, and was just then busy soldering some tinware, two or three smoke-blackened kettles lying at his feet.

Suddenly Joe remembered that one of his linchpins wanted strengthening. It would be a good opportunity to "break the ice" with the pedlar: and he determined to avail himself of the chance by offering him the job.

The pedlar was perfectly willing to undertake the task, and seemed to be quite as pleased as Joe to have a spell of gossip.

The carter stood beside the fire in the shelter of the boulders, and (either from nervousness, or purely out of absent-mindedness) he kept denting the grass, every now and then, with the heavy, brass-shod handle of his whip, while the conversation, which at first came little closer to either than the distant plain of the sea that they could perceive dark against the horizon, gradually came as close to them as the keen October wind, that was finding its way covertly to their bodies all the time.

Before he fully realised how perilously confidential he was becoming, Joe had told the pedlar the tale of his woes and disappointments—the miller's promise to him, and its withdrawal; Ezekiel's promise, and its non-fulfilment; the way in which he had been badgered and made a fool of in the crabber's cottage; and his fixed intention to go to America, in spite of everything and every one, if only he could get the money: and get it he would, by hook or by crook! Yes, even if he had to sell every stick of his furniture, and the very bed from under his wife, he would get the money and he would go! He wasn't going to be made a fool of in this way—not he! A parcel of women trying to badger a man between them; and almost calling him a liar to his very face—he wouldn't

stand it! He would show them what he was made of—that he *would*, they should find! They should see he wasn't a tailor's dummy—a coat and trousers stuffed with bran—but a man with spirit (darn them!) and a man who would have his way!

"Quite right, too!" said the pedlar, who had been helping him on sympathetically. "Wha's the good of a man, ef he caan't crawl over the wemmin? A fine world it wed be—wedn't it?—ef they was to crawl over he! Keep them onder, an' make them know their places—tha's *my* motter! Onnly thee gi' them a lesson weth the layste taste of a whelp-lash in it: an' thee'll see they waan't forgit it in a hurry—young or owld!"

"Darned, ef I wedn' do it, too! ef it hadn' ben for Ezekiel. I want to get that ten pounds out of *he*. An' I'll git it too, by hook or by crook!" growled the carter.

"Iss: but are'ee sure he got it?" queried the pedlar, watching the carter intently with his little beady eyes.

"Well, me wife do say he have: an' *she* ought to know. She towld me, 'fore we was marr-ried, her faather was better off than folks gov' un credit for: an' she proved it, too, by gittin' nigh on forty pounds out of un."

The pedlar noted, mentally, that it *was* from the crabber, then, the money had really come. Their previous statement to him was merely a lie: as he had been inclined to think it from the first. But the knowledge that they had tried to deceive him, only (if possible) increased his friendliness. "An' his promisin'ee the ten pounds, all so natural an' friendly like, do sim to prove that he got money, an' don't mind'ee knawin' it. He've keeped it putty close, though, from every wan else. Where ded 'a git it from, you: do'ee know?" said the pedlar carelessly. "Kind o' wreckin' like, s'pose? Found a body from a wreck—or somethin' o' that sort."

"Iss, 'spect; somethin' o' that sort o' thing. Drusilla wedn' tell me. 'T'es a kind o' saycret, she do say. But from what I can make out—through puttin' two an' two together—it *must* be somethin' o' that sort. Caan't be anwthin' else."

"No; o' coorse not. They must be all in the saycret down there, s'pose?" queried the pedlar, watching the carter closely.

"That they are—all of them!"

"That li'l maid Morvenna—she the schoolmaster es courtin'—es she in it, too, shud'ee think?" the pedlar questioned.

"Not a bit o' doubt about it!" cried the carter, with vicious emphasis. "She's wan o' the wust o' the whole lot—she es!"

"There's no love lost between'ee, b'leeve; es there?"

"I do hate the li'l vixen like poison!" cried Joe savagely. "I'd like to thrash her weth this here whelp 'till she cudn' stand up!"

"Never changed thy mind between the sesters, ded'ee?" queried the pedlar, insinuatingly.

"What'ee mayne; changed me mind? I don't onderstand'ee."

"Never courted wan, an' marr-ried the awther?"

"Not I!" cried Joe disdainfully. "A skein o' thread like she, warn't wuth a man thinkin' of!"

"The schoolmaster do think awtherwise."

"Lev' un: an' good luck to un! He'll find he got a li'l tartar in she!"

"Do the schoolmaster knaw of the saycret, do'ee think?"

"Caan't say: 'spect not. He might cry off his bargain in a hurry, ef he ded."

"Or it might be for that—for the money—that he's maynin' to marr-ry her?"

"Might be, too. Never thought o' that."

"Might be merely out o' greediness—to keep the money for she an' the schoolmaster—that she fired-up so agen'ee, when thee come for thy few pounds?"

"Might be, you. Never thought o' that, now."

"'Tis onnly sence the wreck o' the *Gannet*, b'leeve, that he ben so flush o' money?"

"Onnly sence then, b'leeve," echoed the carter.

"The forty pounds that he gov'd'ee . . ."

"I onnly see'd thirty-eight," interposed the carter.

"Well, the thirty-eight suvrins, was they English wans, or Australians?"

"Australians, b'leeve, all o' them. They lighty-yellow wans, they was."

"Thought as much," quoth the pedlar. And he repeated the words musingly: "Iss . . . I thought as much." Suddenly his little beady eyes filled vivaciously with life, glittering as if, in another minute, they would throw off visible sparks. "Tell'ee what," he cried to Joe; "b'leeve I can help'ee ovver the stile—ef thee railyly want to git ovver it. Honour bright! do'ee *railyly* want to go to Ameica?" And he watched the carter's face like a ferret watching the eyes of a rat.

"I'd go next week, ef I had the money! Darn them all, ef I we'n'!"

"An' vhat wed'ee do, now, to git the money to take'ee ovver?" asked the pedlar.

"I'd do anything!" blurted out the carter, with an almost savage energy.

"Anything, eh? . . . Well," said the pedlar meditatively, "b'leeve I can manage the matter for'ee, on a pinch—on a pinch. I'll finish this li'l job for'ee—waan't take five minutes, now—an' then we'll talk ovver matters, an' see ef we can come to terms."

"Right! I'm agreeable!" replied the carter boisterously; in a tone whose assumption of stout-heartedness his eyes certainly belied.

As he stood punching the turf with the handle of his whip, while the pedlar finished off his job deliberately, Joe felt half inclined to take to his heels; or, at any rate, to crack his whip warningly over the horses and rattle off across the moor without waiting for further developments.

It was the first time in his life that he had had dealings with one presumably so close a relative of the devil: and at the mere thought the carter's heart was shaken with

strange, formless terrors, trembling almost as violently as the pulses in his wrists.

But the rancorous desire to wreak his will on those who had thwarted him, was even stronger than the fear that glimmered tremulously through his thoughts.

If he *could* get what he was hankering after—get it he *would*! And if the price he had to pay for it were an exceeding heavy one, so much heavier, in proportion, should be the weight of his hand when it fell presently upon those who had driven him to pay the price!

The wind sighed wearily and drearily across the moor, now whining fretfully and peevishly like a thing in pain, and now rising to a long, lugubrious moan almost uncanny in its note of human melancholy: presently dying away, as if through exhaustion, into a lingering wail so indescribably mournful that it made the blood creep as if the veins were choked with ice. The huge, dusky cloud-shadows drifted rapidly across the moor and the adjacent hill-slopes, chasing each other like a rout of half-invisible goblins: and the gleams of deepening colour that came and went along the heather (as the light flushed it vigorously or was faintly withdrawn from it) produced an effect so eerie and so peculiarly unsettling, that it was not unlike watching a vast, titanic countenance changing its expression with a suddenness as inexplicable as it was sinister. So that presently, as he stood in the shelter of the boulders, what with the hollow moaning of the wind around him, the brightening and darkening of the moor as of a thing palpitating with life, and within him the mingling of fear and of an evil fascination, the carter felt as oddly disturbed and disquieted as if the ugly little pedlar—his dusky face coloured to the hue of hot copper by the red glow of the fire over which he was working—were really as uncanny as his reputation hinted at, and not only could foretell events but could make them happen *if he chose*.

Indeed, the strangeness of the scene made Joe shiver so uncomfortably that the pedlar, on glancing up at him sharply and suddenly, noted, with malicious satisfaction, how Joe

instinctively drew his head back against his shoulders, his eyes dilating with fright and shifting to and fro restlessly—not unlike, thought the pedlar, an animal caught in a trap and suddenly perceiving something it is now in mortal terror of.

The pedlar licked his lips; it was meat and drink to him, this. His mouth curved into a cruel smile, and, as he lowered his head again, his eyes glowed sombrely.

“Le’s see ef it’ll do now,” he remarked presently, his task finished.

Joe was only too glad to have something definite to do instead of standing there watching the misshapen little oddity, and quaking uncomfortably in his every member as he did so. “Ay, le’s see! Glad tes done!” said he, briskly.

The two men went to the waggon together; and Joe pronounced the job well done and very satisfactory.

“Wha’s to pay?” he asked, his hand diving into his trousers pocket.

“We’ll settle that weth the awther matter—call it ‘*nawthin*,’ as between friends. But thee can charge the miller sexpence: the job es wuth it, b’leeve.”

“Thaank’ee,” said the carter awkwardly: a little apprehensive of the obligation, though he was afraid to reject it. In getting into the pedlar’s clutches even in so small a matter as this, he was aware of something not unlike the sensation of an animal that feels round it the first tentative fold of the python. He kept his hand in his pocket, still fingering the coins there, but he had not the courage to draw them out and to insist on the payment.

“Come into me van weth me, we shall be out o’ the wind and more quieter,” said the pedlar, beginning to hobble towards the van, which was sheltered among the boulders not far from the fire.

A few yards away, his ragged little pony—two of its legs *hobbled*¹ to prevent it from straying—was cropping the grass greedily with its head to the wind, its long mane

¹ Fastened together with a rope.

and tail blowing about freely; and the pedlar, as he glanced around him with all the pride of proprietorship, felt his veins swelling with a sense of arrogant masterfulness as he heard the carter following so unwillingly at his heels, and decided that presently this man, who had lied to him and insulted him, should be in his power as completely as the pony that he could torture as he pleased.

As he was entering the little van, the carter gave a hurried look over his shoulder—casting a swift, agitated glance across the moor, as if his eyes were searching out some direction in which he could run for safety—and the sight of the wide, open hills, with their tiny clusters of cottages, the distant line of the sea dark against the horizon, and his waggon with the team of horses patiently waiting for him, made him almost decide, even now, to draw back and take to his heels.

But at that moment the pedlar, from within the vehicle, addressed some remark to him as he was clearing a seat for their accommodation, and Joe, quaking in his vitals, his legs trembling under him, clutched his whip tightly and entered the little van.

The great clouds sailed up darkly and massed thickly over the sky, the wind wailed across the moor almost with the lamentation of a sentient thing, the freshness of the daylight died away into an amber glimmer in the west, and then, somewhere far off among the distant hills, the faint rumbling of thunder was intermittently audible.

As the heavy booming sullenly reverberated across the moor, the waggoner's horses began to get restless, pawing the ground and jingling their harness noisily.

Then out of the van Joe came stumbling hurriedly—a dazed, bewildered look upon his face—and hastened to his team, the pedlar hobbling at his heels.

The two men shook hands ostentatiously before they parted—Joe eyeing the pedlar askance as the latter gripped his hand—and then Joe mounted to his seat and cracked the whip over his team with a feeling of immense relief at being again among things familiar to him.

"Remember—a strict saycret!" cried the pedlar to him warningly.

"Shaan't forgit, thee may be sure!" replied the carter, starting his team.

And with that, as another and louder boom resounded across the moor, the carter drove off rapidly, with a noisy rattling and jingling that was music to his ears.

The swarthy little pedlar, standing near the fire, gazed after the waggon intently for two or three minutes, with a look whose sinister, almost malignant, exultation would have made a child run to hide its face in its mother's apron in terror.

"I got'ee in my haands at laast, Ezekiel Trevaskis! . . . Got'ee here *at laast*!" said he, closing his fingers tightly.

The thunder again began to boom and the lightning to flash vividly, and the pedlar, rubbing his skinny hands gleefully together, hobbled back to his van muttering almost at every step, "Iss! I got'ee at laast! Thee caan't escape me now!"

CHAPTER XXVI

A MAN AND HIS BURDENS

MORVENNA and the schoolmaster duly walked to Newlyn on the Saturday morning, and found Ezekiel just coming up on the quay. He had his empty provision-bag tucked under his arm and his great sea-boots slung over his shoulder, while in his left hand he carried a dozen fresh pilchards strung together by a horsel¹ run through their gills.

The little fishing-town to-day was brimming over with life. The boats were all in harbour (either here or in Penzance), and all the men and youngsters were at home for the Sunday rest—that rest which the Cornish fisher-folk most religiously observe, and which they have since fought for so

¹ One of the small tying-ropes of a net.

resolutely with their east-country rivals.¹ The crooked little streets with their quaint, foreign-looking architecture—streets tortuous and rough almost to the point of exasperation—were full of fishermen, fishers' wives, children by the score; and well-nigh in every direction there were nets, oars, old wooden blocks, odds and ends of rope, pieces of rusty chain, fish on strings, fish on skewers, fish on the window-sills, fish against the cottage-fronts, and, of course, fish (or, at least, the refuse from them) in all the gutters plentifully. The smell of sails being "barked" and of boats being tarred, the oily odours from the fish-cellars, the briny smell pervading everything, the hundreds of gulls wheeling to and fro around the harbour, the sight of sea-boots, blue guernseys, and yellow sou'westers—outside the doors, against the walls, in fact, almost everywhere—and of big, bearded men and white-aproned women moving to and fro as busy as bees in a hive, all these were elements in the *ensemble* which Newlyn presented this morning, as Morvenna and the schoolmaster, with Ezekiel walking heavily between them, threaded their way through it as rapidly as they could.

Ezekiel was fondly proud of his bright young daughter. His affection for her had the depth of root, and the vigorous tenacity of life, of those great primal passions that permeate a man's consciousness as influentially and as vitally as the arteries knit together and control his physical system. And as the arteries may be said to hold the secret of a man's body, so might Ezekiel's love for Morvenna be said to hold the secret of his life. Her happiness was his great ambition, and to secure it he would have sacrificed his own willingly—nay, gladly! Could he have felt certain that the irremediable ruin of his life would not affect Morvenna's happiness

¹ The great fishing-riots of May 1896—when a detachment of soldiers on land and at sea a gunboat, a torpedo-boat destroyer and a special service ship, were required to keep the peace between the men of the east-country boats and the Cornish fishers—were entirely due to the determined stand which the Mount's Bay men made on this crucial question. That the Cornish fishers won the fight and gained their point, I hope permanently, is something I feel the heartiest satisfaction in noting.

in the least, he would have bowed his head to the penalty that he felt he deserved: would have confessed his sin openly to the world and have taken his punishment like a man. But when he thought of Morvenna suffering cruelly as the result of such confession, the man's heart was racked with intolerable anguish. Rather than subject her to such a disgrace, he would endure the agony of this torture that was assailing him at every turn, without making a single sign that an enemy could lay hold of. He was proud, for Morvenna's sake, of the sweetheart she had secured; and that the girl, loving the schoolmaster with such abounding fondness as she did, should be put in peril of losing him through her father's sin and baseness, was something that haunted Ezekiel to the pitch and height of agony. As he walked along this morning between his daughter and the schoolmaster, Ezekiel wished, in his despair, that Death would leap suddenly on him from its ambush—would seize him by the throat *now* and clear him out of their way for ever! Oh (he thought, over and over again) if a man, when he is bruised and defeated and intolerably weary, only could dig his own grave-pit and lie down in it without shame!

In vain Morvenna and the schoolmaster tried to brighten his furrowed countenance; the crabber, his head hanging and his eyes seeking the ground dejectedly, remained so drearily uncheered, so bent and beaten in his aspect, that the schoolmaster's heart grew strangely sad. As he watched the old man dragging his feet so heavily along the road and found him even refusing the solace of the pipe, the schoolmaster thought that part of the effect might be due to physical weariness, and he therefore begged Ezekiel to take his arm and lean on him, and also to let him carry the heavy sea-boots.

Morvenna's eyes eloquently expressed her gratitude: but Ezekiel, though he thanked the schoolmaster, and that very heartily, would accept neither of the suggestions, and held to his resolve.

Nor would he now take his daughter's arm, which she

affectionately tried to press on him ; fearing, if he did so, that his refusal of the schoolmaster's would look like a slight.

"I'm none so tired," said he ; "I can manage all right, thank'ee !"

"If you don't mind, dear," Morvenna remarked to the schoolmaster, "as father seems to be so very tired, I'll stay indoors with him this afternoon."

"Certainly, my love !" said the schoolmaster promptly.

"No, no !" rejoined Ezekiel : "I waan't have it—take thy walk ! Shaan't stay indoors for me—why shud'ee ?"

"Very well, father," replied Morvenna, "that will be all right. I'll take a walk in the evening, instead," she whispered to the schoolmaster.

"About five, dear ?" he queried.

Morvenna nodded, and the subject was dropped.

It was a very pleasant day for the time of the year. True, there was a good deal of wind abroad—as there usually is in autumn on this bleak peninsula, with its elevation of nearly two hundred feet above the sea-line and its exposure to the direct and unbroken onslaught of the winds that eternally disquiet the Atlantic — but the sunlight, when it shone out clear and strong, lighted up the slopes and the long ridges of the hills with their powdering of granite boulders and their red smear of heather, shone on the brown thatched roofs of the tiny cottages scattered among the folds and wrinkles of the hills, on the thin lines of the stunted hedgerows and on the small patches of cultivated land, till the scene, in its immense range and its dwarfing perspective, had all its details brought out so sharply that it produced, when viewed from one of the higher hilltops, something of the impression of an enormous plaque.

The crows were cawing hoarsely as they winged their way across the sky, their blunt, ragged wings showing up clearly against the blue ; and on the topmost spray of a wind-bent hawthorn-bush, which was literally laden with brilliant vermilion berries, a robin had perched and was trilling cheerfully, its clear, brief song, in spite of its

autumnal suggestions, being as pleasant to the ear as the sight of the bird was to the eye.

The sky, though full of rapidly moving clouds, in the interspaces was of a blue which was brilliant, if a little hard; and everywhere—along the hedgerows, above the treetops, across the slopes—were the movement and the sound of the unceasing wind: its tireless flow, and its equally tireless moaning, forming an adjunct to every impression and an accompaniment to every thought.

As the three wayfarers walked along slowly—the speed of the younger folks accommodated, for the nonce, to that of Ezekiel—Morvenna and the schoolmaster were looking beyond the searing autumn to the spring with its bluebells, its soaring larks, and its wealth of greenery; seeing already (and but just ahead of them) its sunshine on their path. But Ezekiel saw ahead of him only the hard, black winter—the trees leafless, the hedges stripped, the hills seamed and patched with snow. Never again would the skylark sing in his heart for him: there the owl would hoot drearily and the boding raven croak—but music, with the note of hope in it, he would never hear again!

At the little footbridge over the stream, the schoolmaster wished Morvenna and her father “good morning”—in order to free them from the necessity of asking him into the cottage at a time that, presumably, would be so inconvenient to them—and let the crabber and his daughter go up to the house alone.

At the end of the cottage, Morvenna turned to kiss her hand to him smilingly, and the schoolmaster returned the salute with a pleasure equal to her own; after which, he leisurely took his way homeward, to spend a quiet afternoon dreaming idly among his books.

Morvenna strongly dissuaded her mother from referring to Joe's recent visit to the cottage until Ezekiel had rested and had had his dinner. It was, therefore, not until the middle of the afternoon that Ezekiel became aware of the way in which his son-in-law had reported, and had distorted, the brief talk they had had together.

affectionately tried to press on him ; fearing, if he did so, that his refusal of the schoolmaster's would look like a slight.

"I'm none so tired," said he ; "I can manage all right, thank'ee !"

"If you don't mind, dear," Morvenna remarked to the schoolmaster, "as father seems to be so very tired, I'll stay indoors with him this afternoon."

"Certainly, my love !" said the schoolmaster promptly.

"No, no !" rejoined Ezekiel : "I waan't have it—take thy walk ! Shaan't stay indoors for me—why shud'ee ?"

"Very well, father," replied Morvenna, "that will be all right. I'll take a walk in the evening, instead," she whispered to the schoolmaster.

"About five, dear ?" he queried.

Morvenna nodded, and the subject was dropped.

It was a very pleasant day for the time of the year. True, there was a good deal of wind abroad—as there usually is in autumn on this bleak peninsula, with its elevation of nearly two hundred feet above the sea-line and its exposure to the direct and unbroken onslaught of the winds that eternally disquiet the Atlantic — but the sunlight, when it shone out clear and strong, lighted up the slopes and the long ridges of the hills with their powdering of granite boulders and their red smear of heather, shone on the brown thatched roofs of the tiny cottages scattered among the folds and wrinkles of the hills, on the thin lines of the stunted hedgerows and on the small patches of cultivated land, till the scene, in its immense range and its dwarfing perspective, had all its details brought out so sharply that it produced, when viewed from one of the higher hilltops, something of the impression of an enormous plaque.

The crows were cawing hoarsely as they winged their way across the sky, their blunt, ragged wings showing up clearly against the blue ; and on the topmost spray of a wind-bent hawthorn-bush, which was literally laden with brilliant vermilion berries, a robin had perched and was trilling cheerfully, its clear, brief song, in spite of its

autumnal suggestions, being as pleasant to the ear as the sight of the bird was to the eye.

The sky, though full of rapidly moving clouds, in the interspaces was of a blue which was brilliant, if a little hard; and everywhere—along the hedgerows, above the treetops, across the slopes—were the movement and the sound of the unceasing wind: its tireless flow, and its equally tireless moaning, forming an adjunct to every impression and an accompaniment to every thought.

As the three wayfarers walked along slowly—the speed of the younger folks accommodated, for the nonce, to that of Ezekiel—Morvenna and the schoolmaster were looking beyond the searing autumn to the spring with its bluebells, its soaring larks, and its wealth of greenery; seeing already (and but just ahead of them) its sunshine on their path. But Ezekiel saw ahead of him only the hard, black winter—the trees leafless, the hedges stripped, the hills seamed and patched with snow. Never again would the skylark sing in his heart for him: there the owl would hoot drearily and the boding raven croak—but music, with the note of hope in it, he would never hear again!

At the little footbridge over the stream, the schoolmaster wished Morvenna and her father “good morning”—in order to free them from the necessity of asking him into the cottage at a time that, presumably, would be so inconvenient to them—and let the crabber and his daughter go up to the house alone.

At the end of the cottage, Morvenna turned to kiss her hand to him smilingly, and the schoolmaster returned the salute with a pleasure equal to her own; after which, he leisurely took his way homeward, to spend a quiet afternoon dreaming idly among his books.

Morvenna strongly dissuaded her mother from referring to Joe's recent visit to the cottage until Ezekiel had rested and had had his dinner. It was, therefore, not until the middle of the afternoon that Ezekiel became aware of the way in which his son-in-law had reported, and had distorted, the brief talk they had had together.

He felt, however, too thoroughly beaten in the battle of life, too utterly robbed of heart, too helpless through very hopelessness, to fight even against a liar and a coward such as Joe.

"He said he wed wait 'till March, when the baby es expected, before he went off," remarked Ezekiel querulously: "but ef he waan't," he added, "well . . s'pose he waan't; an' there's a' end of it." And he humped himself together in his chair by the fire as if his vitality were so low that he could not even keep warm.

"Es 'a to have the money, then, after all?" asked Malva.

"Lev' un have it—lev' un have it," was all Ezekiel said.

"How about payin' it back?" Malva began, hesitatingly.

"Never want to see the colour o' the money agen, so long as I live! Lev' un keep it, an' welcome," said Ezekiel gloomily.

"It'll onnly bring Drusilla misfortune: I'm sure o' that!" said Malva.

"Can I help it?" quoth Ezekiel. "Do I thrust it down her throt? Ha'n't she all'ys ben hankerin' after it, ever sence it ben in the house?"

"She's thy awn daughter, anyhow," said Malva, reproachfully.

"Iss: an' I wish she'd never touched a penny of it," quoth Ezekiel. "But the mischief's done now: an' she must beer it as best she can."

"Well, her troubles have begun early, poor cheeld!" rejoined Malva.

"Ef wan cud onnly look ahead! Ef wan cud onnly see the end of it all!" said Ezekiel.

"Ay, dear heart! I do wish it scores o' times a day!"

"'Tes part o' the punishment, s'pose," remarked Ezekiel drearily. "Ef I had to live life ovver agen," he exclaimed, with sudden bitterness, "I wed never try to play the part o' Providence to anywan. They must be jealous of us, the Almighty, or Owld Nick, or Somewan. They're all'ys diggin' traps for us—do what we will."

"Dont'ee talk in that way, faather!" said Malva. "I don't like to hear'ee. It do make me blood run cold."

Ezekiel made no reply, but stared gloomily into the fire.

Presently Malva ventured again: "An' when es 'a to have it?"

"Any time. When 'a do want it. Don't matter to me."

"Any time? To go off when he like, an' layve Drusilla?"

"How can us stop un—ef the man have made up his mind?"

"By keepin' the money from un 'till the baby es born, o' coorse!"

"Well, I layve it to thee to settle. Manage it in thy awn way, mawther," said Ezekiel helplessly. "Don't mind me. I shaan't interfere."

"Then he waan't have it 'till the baby es born, tha's sartin! Fancy the cheeld havin' to go through her trouble wethout her husband weth her! No! I'll see he do stop in England 'till Drusilla es a mawther. An' p'raps when he's a faather," Malva added wistfully, speaking out of the mother-heart that leaped at such memories, "p'raps *then* he waan't be so wishful to go."

CHAPTER XXVII

EXHAUSTED AFFINITIES

THE brief conversation between Malva and Ezekiel on the Saturday afternoon, proved to be more pregnant with consequences than either of them had dreamed of.

Early in the following week, when Ezekiel was again at sea with the fishing fleet, Joe compelled Drusilla (most decidedly against her will) to go down to the cove and learn what had taken place there. She was to find out whether Ezekiel had been told that they had called for the money; and, if so, how he had received the news

and what he had said. Above all, Joe insisted to her that she must find out what likelihood there was of his getting the money promptly—say, in two or three weeks at the farthest, he suggested. That Ezekiel would lend him the money, Joe pretended to take for granted; again dinning it in Drusilla's ears that her father had promised to do so; and that he would be expected to keep his word. As he would be told, if it were necessary! Joe added, in the tone of a threat.

Drusilla, accordingly, went down to her father's cottage, and there heard (without surprise) how weakly Ezekiel had yielded in the matter, and how Malva then had taken the affair into her own hands.

But the position her mother had taken up, and from which she was determined not to budge, commended itself to Drusilla at this particular juncture much less than it would have done a week or two ago: when her thoughts on certain matters had not so definitely taken form. She recognised the affectionate care that had dictated her mother's protection of her; but whether she felt as glad at the imagined result as she presumably was expected to be, was something she was not at all anxious to be cross-examined on.

"'Tes a poor look-out for'ee," said Malva to her; "thy man wantin' to be off an' layve'ee—an' 'fore the cheeld do come, too!"

"Lev' un," said Drusilla, carelessly.

"'Tes aisier to lev' un go than to git un back, thee'll find, me cheeld."

"What can I do? I caan't do nawthin'. Lev' un go, ef he do want to."

"Well, ef a young wife, like thee, caan't keep a man home—an' surely thee'rt young enough to plaise anywan," said her mother, "then 'tes no use talkin' 'bout the matter, sim to me. The world he do want to see; an' he waan't rest 'till he do see it, s'pose."

Drusilla sat silent; restlessly biting her lip, and nervously

twisting and untwisting the end of her apron in her hands.

"Thee'rt onlucky in thy bargain, me cheeld," Malva said presently. "I b'leeve 'tes all the fau't o' that money thee furnished on: an' the money that thee spent in dressin' up for'n at the fust. That money es ill-wished, I do b'leeve," she insisted solemnly. "Better thee'd never touched a penny of it, me cheeld."

Drusilla's eyes wandered from the toes of her boots to the lime-ash floor, as she remarked slowly, and much as if thinking aloud, "Iss, I'm beginnin' to be haaf afraid of it meself. I've thought a lot ovver what thee said about it before: an' there do sim to me railly to be a dayle o' truth in it. More than I thought at fust, when thee mentioned it to me, mother. It do play on me mind often an' often, when I'm alone."

"Iss; 'tes goin' to be the ruin of us—that money!" said Malva gloomily.

When Drusilla brought back to her husband Malva's emphatic message that he could have the money as a free gift on the day the baby was born; but not a day before, not even as a loan; Joe fell into such a black and sullen fit of temper that Drusilla was almost afraid to stay in the house with him: she had a kind of vague, frightened feeling that he might perhaps murder her in her sleep.

"Thee'll all of'ee regret it!" said Joe, a latent menace in his tones. "I gov'ee the chaance—all of'ee—now thee must look out for theeselves!"

"What are'ee drivin' at?" asked Drusilla, watching him uneasily.

"Ask on!" sneered the little man, glowering at her wrathfully.

"Don't b'leeve thee knaw theeself," quoth Drusilla bluntly; her recent feeling of contempt for him again asserting itself, as she watched the little man strutting up and down the kitchen, with his hair bristling with anger and his face as red as a hollyhock. Do what she would, she felt as powerless against this loathing contempt for him as if

it had been an inherited aversion, rooted deep in the recesses of her nature.

"*Wan* thing I *do* know, ef thee'd like to know it too," sneered Joe, eagerly seizing the opportunity to insult her, "an' that es, that when I was goin' ovver the church-stile weth'ee, I wished 'twas weth somewan else—an' somewan thee know well!"

Drusilla coloured violently, from the nape of the neck to the temples; her ears growing almost as red as blood at the insult.

But she restrained, by a visible effort, the reply that rose to her lips. In order, however, to find some outlet for her emotion, she began busily to plait the hem of her apron with her fingers: aware of such a passionate animus within her that self-control had to be muscular as well as mental.

"Tha's *wan* thing I do know," he repeated, enjoying her discomposure: "an' anawther thing I can giss at. An' tha's—*who robbed the sailor!*" he cried to her tauntingly. "Who robbed the dead man from the *Gannet*—can'ee tell me?" he sneered, flinging the question at her with a vicious emphasis that made her start.

Drusilla rose to her feet, and stood fronting him erect and rigid. But he noticed, with secret gloating, that she pressed her hand to her side tightly and seemed to gasp for breath.

"Go on, Joe Rosevear!" said she, looking him straight in the eyes. There was a reserve of force behind the words which gave them a value by no means inherent in them. But of this Joe, in his eager malice, was entirely unconscious. For every mind has its peculiar quality of ignorance; a quality as distinctly personal to itself, as the reach of a man's vision is to his eyes.

"Iss! Tell me! Can'ee?" and he fronted her as upright as he could manage to stretch himself; but, still, lower than the big blonde woman by a head.

"Go on, Joe Rosevear!" Drusilla repeated, with terrible calmness: and her eyes seemed slowly turning to steel.

"Thy faather, warn't it—sly owld Ezekiel Trevaskis . . ."

Drusilla snatched up the heavy whip that lay on the chair beside her, and dealt him a blow across the face that made him stagger.

Joe howled out an oath of unproducible profanity, and as he stumbled, half blinded, against the kitchen table, with a sudden burst of energy (whose unexpectedness simply appalled him) Drusilla rushed at him and began lashing him over the head and shoulders, over the thighs, over the legs, over his hands thrown up to shield him: lashing and thrashing and belabouring him anywhere and everywhere, and that with a speed and passion that he literally could not stand against.

Joe tried to look around—to grope around—for something to repel her with. But the terrible lash every instant was cutting and welting and stinging him, was dazing and blinding and bewildering him to a pitch of terror that almost maddened him.

Dancing and skipping and trying to dodge her, and yelling the while like a veritable maniac, the little man at last, in a perfect panic at the fury of the onslaught, took to his heels and bolted out into the road.

After him rushed Drusilla—bare-headed, whip in hand.

Joe glanced over his shoulder and, seeing her coming, pelted along the highway as fast as his legs could carry him.

And to the very door of the mill Drusilla pursued him in her magnificent fury; her draperies billowing and flying, her hair unfastened and streaming wildly.

As he reached the mill he could hear her behind him, panting loudly and heavily; and into the mill he darted, like a rat into its hole, and slammed and bolted the great door with a speed and energy so amazing that it was certain only sheer desperation could have wrought him up to it.

Standing in the windy roadway, with her long brown hair streaming over her shoulders, her eyes blazing angrily, and her face full of colour, Drusilla broke his whip across

her knee and flung it into the hedge, and then—trembling now in every nerve with excitement—she turned and slowly and unsteadily retraced her steps to her cottage, feeling as weakly hysterical as a girl.

CHAPTER XXVIII

A MIDNIGHT CONFERENCE

ABOUT ten that night, Joe came slouching into the cottage with the pedlar at his heels.

Joe's face, still red and welted from the whip, was scowlingly dark and with an expression of almost venomous malignancy in it; but Drusilla was much less discomposed at this than she was at the sight of his sinister companion.

Had Joe entered the cottage with the traditional devil at his side—horned and hoofed and tailed, and with his pitchfork in his hand—Drusilla could not have been much more astounded.

She stared at the two men, for a moment, with a glance almost of stupefaction.

"Take a sait," said Joe to Tom.

"Do'ee object to smokin', missis?" said the pedlar to Drusilla, as he seated himself near the fire.

"Light up, man, ef thee want to!" said Joe to him roughly.

"Not ef the missis do object," quoth the pedlar, with leering politeness. "Fust place, an' fust consideration, to the ladies, have all'ys ben my motter, ever sence I cud toddle."

"Smoke, ef thee want to; I don't mind," replied Drusilla indifferently.

Producing his pipe and his tin tobacco-box, the pedlar laid them on the table. Then he took out some "roll" tobacco, which he proceeded to chop up with his pocket-

knife, and afterwards crumbled carefully between his black and dirty fingers.

Drusilla watched him, all the time, with fascinated intentness: Joe, the while, watching *her* almost as intently.

Having crumbled-up enough tobacco for his purpose, the pedlar, very carefully, filled his black, dirty clay, and then, as carefully taking a single match out of his waistcoat-pocket, struck it on the sole of his boot and "lighted up," with gusto, blowing around him, for a second or two, a perfect cloud of smoke.

"Want supper?" Drusilla asked her husband, curtly.

"No," growled Joe; flinging the negative at her as if it were a missile.

After this, there was silence in the kitchen for several minutes.

Joe sat staring sullenly at the fire; the pedlar smoked peacefully, his hands clasped across his waistcoat; and Drusilla, at the opposite end of the kitchen, sat watching them both with uneasy curiosity.

After about a quarter of an hour of this silence, Drusilla rose from her seat and remarked to her husband, "'Tese 'most 'leven, b'leeve: I'm goin' to bed."

"Go!" growled Joe, in the savagest bass he was capable of.

"Good night," said Drusilla, to the impassive little pedlar.

"Good night to'ee, missis! good night!" said the pedlar; jumping up briskly from his chair, and bowing to her with a grotesque politeness that made her lips curl contemptuously.

Once in the bedroom, Drusilla did not venture to undress. Taking off her boots, she sat down on the side of the bed, and, blowing out the candle, waited patiently the course of events—her nerves tingling with agitation.

Below, in the draughty kitchen, when Drusilla had gone upstairs, the two men drew their chairs closer together, and immediately began to talk earnestly, though in whispers. They were evidently taking up the threads of a conversation

that had been broken off when they had entered the cottage ; and their renewal of it now was, as evidently, with the keenest interest.

The kitchen, as is usual in the cottages, being unceiled, and the planks that covered it in (and that formed also the floor of the bedroom) having between them occasional interstices through which one could easily have dropped a penny, Drusilla, as she sat motionless in the darkness of the bedroom, could hear the thin rustling sound of the voices underneath her, and occasionally, when the talkers got a little loud in their excitement, could clearly catch a word, or even a fragment of a sentence.

But she was quite unable, sitting here on the edge of the bed, to grasp a sentence connectedly ; or even to seize a clue as to what they talked of so eagerly, and not only so eagerly, but with such unflagging self-restraint. The fact that they were controlling themselves with such deliberate watchfulness, as was evidenced by the way in which they kept their voices at the whispering-pitch, being in itself something that disquieted her greatly.

She slid softly from the edge of the bed, and, as noiselessly as possible, stretched herself at full-length on the floor of the bedroom, placing at one moment her ear, and at another her eye, to the widest interstice she could manage to discover between the planks.

Even now, however, she could hear but little : and that little so indistinctly that to make sense of it was impossible.

She caught words like "*paper*," and "*tickets*," and "*bill*" somebody or something ; confused sounds that might be *streamers*, or *steamers*, or even *schemers* ; a phrase like "*bring them to their senses ;*" and a broken sentence which she took to be, "*in me power an' 'ull have to do it.*"

Presently, she heard the unmistakable chink of coins ; and, on hastily putting her eye to the opening, she perceived the pedlar counting out some sovereigns on the table.

Then he produced a long sheet of paper, closely covered

with writing, which he spread out on the table beside the little heap of coins.

Pointing to the foot of the paper with his finger, he seemed to be informing Joe that he must do something—probably, that he must sign there.

At this point, she caught a word like "*witnesses*" repeated emphatically, and, on putting her ear to the space, she heard the pedlar remark, carelessly, that he could always get those for the price of a pint of beer.

Unhappily, in the interval while Drusilla had her ear at the opening, she missed seeing the end of this episode of the coins.

When she again applied her eye to the space between the boards, the coins and the paper alike had disappeared.

After this she heard references—that, to her, were vague to exasperation—concerning "*clothes*" and "*lines*" and something that sounded like a "*a dress*." And then they fell to whispering again, almost into each other's ears.

Presently she caught a remark from Joe, "*... to collect a bill ... good mind to do it.*" And the pedlar's, "*Iss, that I ned!*" spoken out with incautious loudness.

Suddenly and, to her, with a startling unexpectedness, she heard the clock in the corner of the kitchen clang out the hour: and was surprised to find it was already midnight.

The two men, evidently, must have been a little surprised also; for she heard their feet and chairs begin to move noisily, blending with a medley of other sounds so confusing to her in their tangle, that she took her ear from the crack and applied to it her eye instead.

In the interval, since she had previously looked down into the kitchen, everything had changed, as far as the plotters were concerned.

She managed to glimpse Joe and the pedlar close to the door, and then the door was opened softly, and as softly closed again.

Drusilla sprang to her feet instantly and ran to the window, to see if she could discern the two men in the darkness, and could discover in what direction they were going.

But the clouded October night was as dark as the bottom of a mine-shaft, and she could see nothing but the thick, impenetrable blackness, and hear nothing except the wind, ever moaning unceasingly, and, she fancied (confusing her sensations in her excitement) the tumultuous *thud, thud, thud* of her heart.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE IRONY OF A SACRAMENT

As Drusilla sat here in the darkness, waiting to see what would happen, almost unconsciously she fell to reviewing her life (at least, to looking all round it to the best of her ability): but always with a bitter antagonism towards her husband, and with a bias, equally as pronounced, in the direction of self-defence.

It was as a question of marriage rights, not as a problem of the affections, that the deep and bitter quarrel with her husband presented itself to Drusilla's thoughts to-night. And it was for a fight and a defence on these lines that she endeavoured to prepare herself. Love was out of the question: and affection was beside the mark. It was to be a battle of wills as if for a door-key—not a duel about hearts.

As she sat here brooding over her wrongs and perplexities, the stormy gloom of her thoughts was suddenly lighted up by a vivid flash of suggestion—and her whole frame seemed to quiver in response.

She would leave her husband—she would apply for a “separation order,” and would take up life again practically as a single woman. Yes! that she would! On this she was determined!

The idea, having once entered her mind, took possession of it like the scriptural “legion of devils.” The change of attitude wrought by the simple acceptance of the suggestion was, indeed, so swift and wide as almost to be startling.

All the wrongs and indignities she had suffered during her married life, at once became reasons approving her resolve; and any thoughts opposing it, or even questioning its wisdom, she thrust under foot and scouted and flouted passionately.

But her dogged determination to fight the battle on these lines, held its ground with indifferent success as the night crawled away sluggishly.

The whisper of Fear in her ears was enough to unnerve her, as she sat here hour after hour wondering, with restless anxiety, where her husband had gone, and what he might be doing now, wandering out in the black stormy night with the pedlar—the tempting gold and the mysterious paper as an evil bond between them: almost as if the little oddity were Old Nick himself!

No sooner had she begun to lose her nerve in the matter, than her bravery seemed to ooze away as if through an open wound: and she had to take her courage in both her hands and hold it up with a visible effort, that it might face, without collapse, the fusillade of the hours.

Towards morning, when the grey of dawn began to steal across the world, Drusilla went down to the kitchen and waited there for the day to break; standing motionless at the open door of the cottage—a set, tragic look marring the face usually so attractive.

About sunrise, she lighted the fire and made herself some breakfast, of which she now felt greatly in need; and then she started cleaning up the cottage for the day.

The wind was roaring loudly among the trees in the rear of the cottage, bending their great tops all in one direction, and shaking their ruthless branches with a savage energy that stripped from them the leaves—the living as well as the dead—and drifted them hither and thither and to and fro restlessly: whirling them in eddies on the cartway, driving them fluttering into the hedges, trundling them along the ground with a hopping movement like a flock of sparrows, and sending them scurrying across the grass like so many mice. The smoke, trying to rise up from the great

stone chimney, was beaten down and swept abroad across the high-pitched roof, till it poured over the thatch like so much water, and then vanished into nothingness among the branches of the trees: and everywhere around the cottage there was a sense of stir and disquiet; the flutter, the movement, the rattling of windows and doors, the swirl of leaves and flying twigs, branches threshing together noisily, and the general air of unsettledness and discomfort which the wind brings with it in the more turbulent of its moods.

Try as she would, and she made more than one effort, Drusilla felt unable to continue her work. Every now and then Fear sent its prick through her heart: and she felt like one paralysed as to outward manifestations, but with the brain the while all the more vividly alive because of such lack of interpretative expression.

Until she could see Joe, or hear something about him—know where he was, or what he had been doing—it would be impossible for her to settle down to her household duties.

Twenty times she went to the cottage door, to see if he were visible in any direction, but up to eight o'clock he had failed to appear, and surmises strange as well as sinister began to flit through her mind respecting him.

Shortly after eight, Joe came slouching into the cottage, with his face, as before, as black as a thundercloud.

Without addressing a word to her, he tramped heavily upstairs, neither taking off his hat nor his carter's frock.

While he was up in the bedroom, Drusilla bustled about busily preparing breakfast for him. She thus failed to notice how exceptionally long he remained abovestairs, seeing that, from the first, he was fully dressed for his work. But she *did* notice that he appeared to be making an unusual racket: the thought crossing her mind, casually, that surely he could not be fool enough to be kicking about the furniture out of spite.

When he came tramping downstairs, she seemed to fancy that, in some way, he looked a little nattier than usual. But the fancy was only momentary: and she did not follow it up.

"Thy breakfast's ready," she remarked to him, nodding towards the table.

"Don't want none," said he sullenly.

And he slouched straight across the kitchen to the wide-open door.

Drusilla stared hard at him, and was again aware that there was about him an air of unusual spruceness. But for the soiled carter's frock, his heavy boots and his greasy hat, she would have fancied that he actually had on his Sunday clothes. But, as before, the idea merely passed through her mind fleetingly: and her attention almost immediately was diverted into another channel.

"Shaan't be in to dinner," growled Joe, as he crossed the threshold.

"Want tay earlier?"

"Wait, an' find out."

And, with that, he tramped heavily out through the garden, slammed its gate behind him with quite unnecessary violence, and slouched off sullenly in the direction of the mill.

Not from the door, but through the window, Drusilla watched him out of sight. Indeed, she stood staring through the panes, in a brown study, long after the white carter's frock had disappeared.

The *mass* of his sullenness, rather than its *quality*—the heavy, unrelieved stubbornness of its pressure, as if no power on earth could ever move or conquer it—began now, at last, somewhat to appal her: even though she had decided (and again and again reiterated it) to free herself from her ties to him with as little delay as possible.

She wondered what he would do to her when she applied for a separation order. That he would attempt physical violence towards her, if he saw the chance of doing so successfully, she felt a great and assured dread of: and the horror of battling with him again after the fashion of yesterday, made her flesh shudder, as with nausea, and her heart grow faint.

The morning was well advanced when Drusilla, having

finished her work in the kitchen, went upstairs to dust and "tidy up."

As she put her foot on the landing and glanced casually into the bedroom, she perceived that its contents were in the most reckless disorder: almost everything, in fact, seeming to be topsy-turvy.

The chest-of-drawers, apparently, had been ransacked from top to bottom: all its drawers were pulled out, and the contents were tossed over and tumbled about anyhow. In one corner of the room, Joe's dusty working-clothes were thrown together in a heap, and in another corner she found her best hat and her Sunday dress (they were those she had worn at her wedding in June) slashed and hacked all over as if with a pocket-knife.

Drusilla was almost stunned with surprise. She put her hand to her side, and seated herself, white and gasping, at the edge of the bed. It was less as if a man had been in the room, than as if a great ape had been rummaging through it and tossing the things about in wanton maliciousness.

Suddenly she thought of the few shillings that she had been saving towards the rent and the expenses of her confinement. She went hurriedly to the corner of the drawer where the money should have been—it was only thirteen and sixpence in all—and found, as she had dreaded, that the little heap of silver had entirely disappeared.

Drusilla felt, instinctively, that she was face to face with the most serious crisis in her life. She had a vague suspicion that there might be in it the elements of a catastrophe. But in what form, or on what lines, the catastrophe would overtake her, she was unable to imagine. It showed how deeply rooted was her horror of the man, that the thought kept again and again recurring to her: Would Joe try, one night, to surprise and murder her? Was he even now endeavouring to arrange matters for this end; and then for a secret flight to the other side of the world?

Drusilla thought of flying down to the cove to her mother, to confide to *her* her troubles and disquieting suspicions.

But she decided presently that she would wait and see first how things went. Her mother's handful of troubles was heavy enough already; and Drusilla, having made her worries for herself, must bear, as best she could, the exasperating burden of them.

It seemed as if the perplexities and unhappinesses of her married life were beginning to develop in Drusilla that graver conscience that hitherto had been dormant, or, at least, voiceless and inoperative: seemed even probable that presently, when she should become a mother, her nature might deepen as much in sympathetic womanliness as it would strengthen in its protective instincts—should her chastening continue to the end. But should happiness or pleasure again subtly relax the fibre of it, it was as likely as not that her nature might remain as selfish, and as frankly sensuous, as it had been at any time from her sixteenth year to her twenty-sixth.

As she slowly realised in her mind the significant fact that Joe had gone off in his Sunday clothes (concealed carefully from her notice under his carter's frock) and with her small savings stowed away in his pocket, Drusilla presently began to wonder whether he meant to desert her straight away. The strange interview at midnight between Joe and the pedlar—with the sovereigns and the paper for signature, the mysterious whisperings and mutterings—followed up by Joe's all-night absence from the cottage, and that in the company of the evil little pedlar: all these, taken in conjunction with his conduct this morning, appeared to indicate that her husband had something desperate in his mind: something so alarmingly unusual, and out of the common run of affairs, that it seemed to point to no less than an entire break with his past. Whether this break would come in the shape of his merely deserting her, or of his murdering her and afterwards taking to flight, was something Drusilla found herself unable to decide. And her anxiety and nervous restlessness became consequently almost unendurable.

As the day wore on, Drusilla found herself quite unable to stand the strain of this disquietude.

Finally, between three and four o'clock, she made up her mind to go down to the schoolhouse and intercept Morvenna as she was coming out of school.

Drusilla decided to tell her sister all that had happened, and to ask her to come up and stay with her, say, till eight or nine o'clock; at any rate, until as late in the evening as she could manage: the schoolmaster to come to fetch her and to see her safe home.

Morvenna was not particularly astonished to see Drusilla; but she, literally, was astounded at the tale her sister told her.

Indeed, the news disquieted her to an extent that reacted on Drusilla: so that in the end the two sisters, feeling each nervously hysterical, decided that they dared not face alone, and unknown to their mother, a situation so grave and so full of menacing possibilities.

Malva's reception of the news, though far less flutteringly emotional, was to the full as seriously significant as was Morvenna's.

She decided that she would accompany Morvenna to Drusilla's cottage and would remain there as late as possible: if need be, all night.

The three women accordingly took their way together to the lonely little cottage at the edge of Choone bottoms—its loneliness being to Drusilla now one of its terrors—and there, in the narrowing dusk of the windy autumn afternoon, they waited the course of events as patiently as they could: feeling the while almost as pitifully small and dejected as a group of slaves sitting in the dust of the arena at some great and tragic spectacle in the days of ancient Rome.

CHAPTER XXX

A TROUBLED WATCH

ABOUT nine o'clock, they heard a man's step in the garden.

"Here he comes!" cried Morvenna, starting from her chair.

Malva's face became grave, and Drusilla's almost rigid in its settled tragic expression.

But the man, whoever it was, instead of entering the cottage, came to a stop on the step and knocked respectfully at the door.

Morvenna walked up to the door timidly; and opened it slowly and almost fearfully, her every nerve shaking.

But it was only Mr. Pengelly, the miller, after all.

On perceiving, by the dim candle-light, the three women waiting expectant in the little kitchen, where he had only thought of seeing Drusilla watching solitarily for her husband, the miller was somewhat taken aback. It was almost as though they had had a prevision of the matter that was agitating him, or either knew, or surmised, something more than he was aware of. And the miller, for a moment, felt so uncertain as to his attitude, that what at first had been perplexity charged strongly with sympathy, became perplexity with a touch in it not unlike suspicion.

"Knew wha's become o' Joe, Mrs. Rosevear?" he asked abruptly.

"No," replied Drusilla, rising and going to the door to him. "Esn'a at the mill, then?"

The miller shook his head.

"Have anything happened, do'ee think? Es 'a gone anywhere weth a load? What time ded 'a layve the mill? I ha'n't see'd un sence breakfast."

"Ha'n't see'd un, meself, sence this mornin'," said the miller, still watching her closely and a little suspiciously. "He went to Penzaance weth a load o' flour, an' he was

to call an' collect a bill down Chy'ndour for me (thirteen pounds, eight an' sexpence, the bill was) an' then he was to come straight home agen—no awther stop. I ha'n't clapped eyes on un sence—have thee?"

"No: he ha'n't ben here. Ha'n't see'd sight or sign of un sence breakfast."

"Ben drinkin' heavy, have'a, lately—do'ee happen to know? He looked all cut up an' bruised about the face, like: as ef he'd ben in a fight, or somethin'."

"Not that I know of," replied Drusilla; a marked confusion visible on her countenance. And then she answered boldly—a sudden wave of passion making her defiantly conscious that Joe's reputation was of infinitely less importance to her than was the idea that the miller's confidence in her, at any rate, should remain unshaken—"He was out all night, last night, weth the pedlar. Dedn' come home 'tell after eight this mornin'. An' then he never touched his breakfast—not so much as a bite or sup. '*Shaan't be home to denner,*' he said; an' sulked off. An' when I asked what time he wed be in to tay, he merely grunted, '*Wait, an' find out!*'"

"Had a quarrel, have'ee—you two?" asked the miller.

Again Drusilla decided for the truth. She could not endure the thought that the miller should presently discover that she 'had been deceiving him. *He*, at least, should believe in her frankly: and should have a reason for his trust. "Iss," she replied, looking him full in the face, "we've had a quarrel, an' a bad wan: 'bout as bad as it cud be."

Malva listened to her daughter with nervous anxiety. She doubted the wisdom of these intimate revelations to a mere acquaintance: the secretive instinct of the peasant inclining her strongly to silence on a matter so purely personal. Of her daughter's attitude towards the miller, she had not the faintest idea: and she was restlessly anxious to bring the interview to a close.

"Eh? like that, es it?" said the miller, musingly. "May be somethin' in that, then: likely as not. Ha'n't cut the country, have'a—do'ee think?"

"Don't know no more than the cheeld unborn!" replied Drusilla.

"Weth the pedlar—Tom the Hangman—dedn'ee say? Out all night, last night, weth un, was 'a?"

"Iss," replied Drusilla. "The pedlar come in weth un, somewhere about ten, an' I went off to bed; an' left them here in the kitchen, smokin' an' whisp'rin'. An' just after twelve—I know the time 'cause I heerd the clock strike just afore—he an' the li'l pedlar went off together. Where they went, I don't know; but I was wakin' all night, an' he dedn' come in 'till 'bout eight o'clock this mornin'. What he was doin' all night—out weth that li'l object—I don't know no more than the dead!" she added solemnly.

"Um! I'm afeerd 'tes a bad job, then. Ef he got that money o' mine, likely as not, he's gone off weth it. Though, what the devil he've done weth the waggon an' hosses . . ." and the miller scratched his head in dire perplexity. "'Tis a mixed job this—a terrible mixed job! Good mind to go in to Penzaance," he remarked, "an' see ef I can find out anything about it."

"Do'ee think 'twed be any good?" Drusilla ventured.

"Any good? Bless the woman! I must look after me property, mustn't I? Nowan else waan't, ef I don't, will they? The waggon an' hosses—he caan't ha' gone off an' sowld they, s'pose? Darn it all! Iss! off I'll go—an' that to wance! Will'ee be stayin' here to-night, Mrs. Trevas-kis?" he asked, now addressing Malva, who was standing silent in the background. "Ef so, an' thee'd like to wait up 'till I come back, I'll come here to wance—whatever time it es—an' lev'ee know what I can manage to find out, ef anything."

"Iss; I shall stay here to-night weth Drusilla—me an' Morvenna do mayne to keep her company—an' we'll wait up 'till thee come back, Mester Pengelly."

"Right! I'm glad to hear it! Thank'ee, Mrs. Trevaskis! 'Scuse my want o' manners, swearin' 'fore the li'l maid, but I'm main puzzled—darned ef I arn't!" remarked the

miller. And off he hastened; biting his lips, his brow knit perplexedly.

He went back to the mill for a few minutes, to see that everything was safe there, and to get his dog to accompany him on his long and lonely tramp—to Penzance and back would be a matter of a dozen miles, and it was now, as near as possible, a quarter to ten—and then he set off rapidly along the great black highway: which, at an elevation of nearly two hundred feet above the sea, was exposed for miles to the roaring wind from the Atlantic, without any other shelter than that of the hedgerows, and here and there, at intervals, a stunted clump of trees.

The black stormy night was persistently starless—the vast dome of the sky being thickly veiled with clouds—and the miller, as he tramped along in the darkness, began to feel the dreary loneliness of the highway affect his thoughts in fifty different ways.

For the miller was, in many respects, a typical Cornishman, having in his veins the blood of peasants none of whom, at least for many generations, had passed beyond the bounds of the Cornish land: being as strictly homekeeping folk as if the edict of Saxon Egbert, fulminated against them more than a thousand years ago—that a Cornishman setting foot on Saxon ground should be instantly “done to death,” like a mere wild animal—were even yet in force against the intractable people whose neighbours knew them only to fear and hate them. And always, to the imagination of the Celtic peasant, under the gross and materialising darkness, a brood of sinister and shadowy presences come creeping forth from the ruins of buildings, from the lonely places where crimes have been committed, and from other waste and haunted spots, or project themselves visibly from the atavistic memory and start into life as hallucinations—phantasmal *will o' the wisps* of thought. And the miller to-night, in spite of his many perplexities, felt so full of the superstitions that were a part of his blood-gift, that if any one, coming behind him, had suddenly clapped him on the shoulder, he would have started and trembled as violently as one of his frightened mares.

He had walked for almost three miles without meeting a single person, when suddenly he thought he heard in the distance the rumble and jingle of a waggon, and the sound of horses' feet.

If the dog had not begun to bark, he would almost have fancied, in the present morbid state of his imagination, that it was the mysterious Death Coach, with its headless horses, that was now coming towards him through the windy darkness—the hill he was descending being a reputed haunt of this horror. But the familiar barking of the dog, as at sounds it seemed to recognise, steadied his nerves more than he would have been willing to have owned.

Was it Joe, after all? and had he excited himself for nothing? The miller, in the first moments of doubtful relief, was aware of a tumult of thoughts that confused him irritatingly. If it were Joe coming back, then that hope about Drusilla . . . still, it would mean that the waggon and horses and the money were all right . . . but that other thought . . . darn it all! the devil take the things! he hardly knew whether to be glad, or sorry, at it. And he quickened his rapid pace almost to a run, that he might set his doubts at rest with the least possible delay.

"Hi, there! Who's that?" shouted the miller, as soon as he considered he was near enough to be within hail of the waggon.

"Aw! *thee*, Mester Pengelly, es it?" came from the waggon in the cackling voice of the pedlar. "'Tes all right! Whoa!" (to the horses) "Whoa, you!" And the pedlar, still vociferating at the team, pulled up, with a noisy jingling and rattling, just as the miller came abreast of the horses' heads.

"Where's Joe?" demanded the miller, coming to the front of the waggon and shouting up at the pedlar.

"Git up, Mester Pengelly, will'ee? Ef I may be so bowld as to invite'ee into thy awn waggon. Git up, sir! Le'me lend'ee a hand!" And the pedlar, having obsequiously assisted the miller to the seat beside him, handed over to him the reins and the whip.

The miller started the horses again, and repeated his question angrily. "Wha's become o' Joe! Why esn' *he* here! What possessed un to layve the hosses an' waggon to thee?"

"Iss, true, Mester Pengelly: very true, sir! O' coorse, Joe's place 'tes to be weth the hosses: but a man caan't be in two places, can 'a?"

"What'ee mayne, man? Spaik out plainly—darn'ee!"

"Well, b'leeve Joe ben an' cut the country."

"Cut the country? How? Drunk, es 'a?—in clink, man?—dead?—wha's become of un?"

"I said, 'cut the country,' b'leeve, dedn' I, Mester Pengelly? A man caan't cut the country ef he's drunk, or in clink, can'a? An', ef he's dead, well, he's dead, an' the devil'll look arter un. He waan't be very likely to cut the country *then*."

"Where's 'a gone?"

"To America, b'leeve—like the rest o' them."

"Where ded 'a git the money from?"

"How do I know? He seemed to be putty flush. Ovver twenty pounds in 'es pocket, so he towld me."

"He got that money o' mine, s'pose, down Chy'ndour?"

"Don't knaw nawthin' 'bout no money o' thine, Mester Pengelly. Joe never said nawthin' to me 'bout the subject."

"Where ded *thee* come across un?"

"Down Chy'ndour, b'leeve. He'd strepped off his frock an' got on his best clothes, an' every inch a gentleman he looked, I can tell'ee—drivin' the waggon down to the station weth his pockets full o' suvrins. He asked me ef I'd mind drivin' back the waggon, when I had time, an' I stayed an' see'd un off, an' shook hands weth un at the carr-riage winda. Iss! off to America he es," added the pedlar, "an' gone off like a gentleman, with plenty an' to spare."

"Ded 'a buy his ticket for America in wan o' they Penzaance offices?"

"No! he warn't such a big fool as that. He'll choose his boat when he do git to Liverpool—like any awther gentleman. No watchin' an' trackin', Mester Pengelly, for the likes o' *he*!"

"An' tha's all thee know?"

"Well, p'raps, about all. We had a glass o' beer together, an' a pipe o' baccy, an' such-like; an' we parted as friends shud, for all the gentleman he was. He warn't too proud to shake hands weth me at the carr-riage winda, as I towld'ee; an' I wished un 'good speed,' an' a nice young wife 'mong they American girls; an' he laughed an' said he shud look out for wan the fust thing when he got ovver. He was all'ys a nice, friendly, gentlemanly sort o' fella, was Joe!"

"How long sence thee found out *that*?" said the miller, turning on him sharply. "Was it last night, when he was out weth'ee, all the night, in that van o' thine?"

"Who said so? Who see'd un there?" demanded the pedlar quickly.

"Wha's the use o' lyin', man? He was there, I do know. An' more do know it besides me. So wha's the use o' lyin'?"

"'Twas onnly a li'l matter o' business between us."

"'Bout his goin' off to-day, s'pose?"

"No! nawthin' to do weth that. He wanted a li'l money—so I helped un to it—bein' so friendly as we was."

"Thee'rt at the bottom o' this, Tom, I feel sure!" said the miller.

"No! s'elp me God! strike me dead, ef I am!"

"Thee'lt be struck dead soon enough, man, wethout beggin' for it! Too soon to please'ee, I'm thinkin'," said the miller.

"Who said I shall be struck dead? P'raps I dedn' mayne it, nayther. I take back they words I said, Master Pengelly—I call'ee to witness!" said the little pedlar, now showing a terror that to the miller was inexplicable. But to the pedlar—as his hint to the schoolmaster had guardedly indicated—this idea of being struck dead was one of the terrors of his life. The doom had been "foretold" for him long ago by a noted witch in the "high countries," and his experiences on the exposed moors in many a terrific storm, had bitten the ominous dread of it deep into his brain. His quite involuntary imprecation on himself—which he had only realised through the miller gravely harping on its signi-

ficance—had therefore terrified him to the full extent of his susceptibilities in the matter. And if the miller had chanced to re-open and pursue the subject, the pedlar would not only have recalled his emphatic denial, but would have told the latter much that he was still ignorant of.

But the miller took up quite another aspect of the question: his thoughts having been travelling on altogether different lines. "Well, Tom," he remarked indifferently to the pedlar, "ef thee've finished weth me, I'm willin' to finish weth thee; and thee can go thy awn way agen as soon as thee like. Ef haaf-a-crown'll square matters for drivin' the hosses home"—and he put his hand in his pocket and drew out the coin—"then, there thee are!" and he handed it to the pedlar. "Shall I stop the hosses for'ee? or can'ee git down weth them movin'? Choone bottoms arn't more than haaf a mile ahead of us."

"Thaank'ee—ef thee wedn' mind stoppin' them, Mester Pengelly."

The miller pulled up the horses without another word.

"Good night," said the pedlar, hopping down into the roadway.

The miller started the horses again, and drove on without reply. He decided that he would proceed to the mill—would put up the waggon and stable the horses, that this might be off his mind—and then would go straight to Drusilla's cottage and would tell her everything that had happened, so far as he knew of it. Bad though the news was, he felt assured that already she was more than half prepared for it; and in his heart he was inclined to hope (judging her feelings by his own) that she would really, though perhaps secretly, be glad of the desertion: indeed, would consider it a veritable relief. At any rate, he felt certain that she would soon learn to do so, if only she would be true to her heart and have the courage he desired for her. She was the one woman in the world for *him*! he said to himself, hungrily: all he wanted was that, for *her*, he might be the one man!

CHAPTER XXXI

TIDINGS

THEE'D better go to bed, Morvenna," said Malva to her daughter. "Thee'rt lookin' as slaipy as an owld owl—settin' there blinkin' an' yawnin'."

"No! I'd rather stay up, mother," said Morvenna, yawning again. "I don't want to go to bed till all of us go."

"Well, put on the kittle, then, an' make a cup o' tay. We all of us want fresh'nin' up a bit, sim to me."

Morvenna was just placing the kettle on the fire, that was still burning brightly, late though it was, when they were aware of a soft "*rat-tat!*" at the door.

It was a knocking lighter and more diffident than they had expected from the miller, but perhaps the news he was bringing them was unexpectedly startling.

"It can't be Joe—oh, I hope it isn't!" cried Morvenna.

"Hush!" replied Malva, lifting her finger warningly.

Meanwhile Drusilla had darted to the door and thrown it wide open.

The astonishment of the three women rose to the pitch of amazement, as they perceived on the door-step the little black-browed pedlar, bowing, with awkward politeness, as Drusilla stared in his face.

"See'd the light in thy winda, missis," said he, rubbing his hands together, "so I thought I'd step in to tell'ee a bit o' news."

"Well?" demanded Drusilla. And, "Wha's the news?" chimed in Malva, who, with Morvenna, stood in the doorway close to Drusilla's shoulders.

"Sorry to tell'ee Joe ben an' cut the country," said the pedlar, his features screwed up to as grieved an expression as they could compass. But the glow of light from the kitchen, falling full on his face, exaggerated its expression on lines wholly repellant, and made his beady little eyes

seem actually to sparkle. "I happened to be in to Penzaance an' see'd un when he went off," he continued, the sinister look deepening on his countenance, "an' I shook hands weth un at the carr-riage winda just afore the train started, an' he towld me he was off an' warn't comin back no more." And he began to shake his head in a most melancholy fashion, furtively watching Drusilla all the time.

"There, me dear! There, now!" said Malva, lifting her hands. "He've gone off an' left'ee, the good-for-nawthin' scamp!"

"Where's 'a gone to?" demanded Drusilla, fingering the latch of the door.

"Aw, me dear, gone to America, so he said. 'T'es a whisht bit o' business as ever I heerd of!"

"Thee helped it on putty well, as far as thee cud, dedn'ee?" Drusilla remarked grimly, her eyes flashing at him scornfully. "The money come from *thee*, man: so wha's this pretence about?"

"From *me*, Mrs. Rosevear!" the pedlar lifted his hands in horror.

"They suvrins thee gov' un last night, here in the kitchen, on that table"—Drusilla, with a rapid gesture, thrust out her hand towards the piece of furniture and levelled her finger at it, shaking this indicatively—"what was *they* for, ef not to pay his passage?"

The pedlar stared at her in surprise. "What suvrins?" he tried to ejaculate.

But Drusilla laughed in his face. "Man! I see'd it all through a crack in the bedroom floor!" said she.

"Ha! ha!" laughed the pedlar, but with a laugh devoid of mirthfulness, "trust the wemmin for bein' clever! They're more'n a match for we men: we caan't howld a candle to them! Darned, ef thee arn't wan o' the cleverest wemmin I ever see'd!"

"Ef tha's all thee got to say, git off the doorstep an' take theeself off!"

"S'pose, now, come to that," he added, fumbling in the pocket of his coat, "the awther nice li'l surprise that I was

savin' up for'ee, esn' wuth mentionin': thee do know it already, s'pose?" And his eyes studied her watchfully: to see how much, or how little, her countenance might confess. He drew out a paper from his pocket and began to unfold it carefully. "S'pose thee know everything in thy house—every stick o' furniture in it—the clome,¹ the curtains, the beddin'—*everything*, do belong to *me*!" And he waved the paper towards the kitchen, as if it were a potent witch's wand.

"What'ee mayne?" cried Drusilla, her face betraying her alarm.

And "What'ee mayne?" echoed her mother, at her back.

"As thee know so much, missis," said the pedlar sneeringly, to Drusilla, "do'ee mayne to say thee don't know I got a bill o' sale on the furniture? I gov' Joe ten pounds down, for the things."

"The furniture is my sister's! She bought it with her own money!" cried Morvenna angrily.

"'Scuse me, miss! weth thy faather's money, b'leeve," said the pedlar smoothly. "That money he got," here he coughed significantly, with a leering glance at them: "the money he got, lev' us say, from the wreck o' the *Gannet*: an' no offence meant."

Malva pushed forward and fronted him, her face white and rigid. "What'ee mayne, man!" she cried: her tones tremulous, her eyes unsteady.

"'Tes all right, Mrs. Trevaskis," said the pedlar, rubbing his hands together: "'tes onnly between *friends*. I arn't no town crier: thee can trust *me* to howld me tongue."

The women glanced at one another, uncertain how to act: and equally undecided as to what it was possible to say.

At this moment, the form of the miller appeared at the back of the pedlar: the glow of the fire and the light of the candle clearly illumining the faces of both.

"Eh, Tom, *thee* here?" cried the miller, to the pedlar. "Come sniffin' round like an owld car'yun crow,² have'ee?"

"I come to tell Mrs. Rosevear the whisht news," said the

¹ Earthenware.

² Carrion crow.

pedlar: "not knawin'," he added, with a malicious sneering, "that she'd got anawther man, so soon, ready an' waitin' to run her arrands for her!"

The miller clapped his hand suddenly on the collar of the pedlar's coat, and, lifting him from the ground, shook him as if he had been a rat.

"Le' me down! Le' me down, Mester Pengelly!" bawled the pedlar.

The miller shook him again vigorously, till the little man's jaws rattled noisily against each other.

Morvenna clapped her hands loudly. "Give him another!" she cried delightedly.

"Le' me down, Mester Pengelly! Le' me down!" vociferated the pedlar.

The big miller gave him another shake, growlingly: and then dropped him on his feet with a sudden thump that almost put his spine out of joint.

"Keep a civil tongue in thy head, will'ee? when thee'rt spaykin to *me*, man; or I'll hoss-whelp more than the dust out of 'ee—that I take me oath on!"

"Same as Mrs. Rosevear hoss-whepped her husband, s'pose thee mayne?"

"You ugly little blaggard!" cried the miller, in a burst of anger, "ef you insult anywan here agen . . ."

"She *ded* do it, I tell'ee!" bawled the pedlar, shrinking away from him. "Ask her ef she dedn'! Onnly thee ask her! I shud like to see ef she'll tell a lie," he added, in an impudent undertone.

"Iss, in this case, he's tellin' the truth, for wance," remarked Drusilla, as she stood in the doorway with her face in the shadow. "Joe insulted me, an' I hoss-whepped un 'till he took to his heels. An' I'd hoss-whelp un agen to-morra, ef he insulted me in the same way!"

"There! dedn' I tell'ee! But thee wedn' b'leeve *me*," quoth the pedlar, gloating over what he considered her humiliation. "Iss," he added, "an' Joe was that revengeful about it, that he sowld up everything an' ben an' cut the country . . ."

"Sowld up!" ejaculated the miller. "What'ee mayne about that?"

"I got a bill o' sale on the furniture," said the pedlar gleefully. "Iss! 'tes all mine—all tha's in the house!" And he waved his hand in triumph towards the interior of the kitchen.

"Es this true?" asked the miller, turning to Drusilla.

"He do say it es," replied Drusilla, in the tones of one depressed to weariness.

"Dedn'ee say, just now, that thee geeked down through the cracks in the floor an' see'd me handin' over the suvrins to un?" the pedlar screeched at her, from behind the miller's shoulder.

"Iss, I see'd'ee handin' over the money to un, an' the paper; but I dedn' know what the paper was, nor what it mayned."

"Well, thee know now!" cried the pedlar sneeringly.

"Le's see the paper, man!" said the miller roughly. "That es," he added, suddenly turning to Drusilla, "that es ef thee don't mind me seein' it, Mrs. Rosevear?"

"Not a bit! Not that I've seen it meself," said Drusilla. "*He* do say 'tes a bill o' sale," she indicated the pedlar by a movement of her head, "but whether 'tes or no, es more than I do know."

The pedlar again produced the paper from his pocket.

"Mind! I hand it to'ee afore witnesses!" he remarked, giving it to the miller.

"Never fear, man! I shaan't ayte it," said the miller. "Iss, tes a bill o' sale all fair and square, b'leeve," he remarked to Drusilla, after he had carefully perused the paper. "But he caan't act on it 'till it ben registered, an' that'll take time. Joe have sowld everything in the house for ten pounds, simmin'ly."

"Every stick o' furniture—the clome, the beddin'—everything!" cackled the pedlar.

"Will'ee le' me advance the money an' pay off this for'ee?" said the miller, turning to Drusilla, who leaned silently against the door-post.

"Better see thy faather fust," said Malva to her daughter.

"How do'ee knaw I want to have it paid off?" quoth the pedlar. "P'raps I'd raather take the things—that do rest weth me, b'leeve. It don't say nawthin' in the paper 'bout payin' back the money."

The miller scratched his head. "Well, what'll'ee do? Shall I advance the money to wance, an' pay un off an' git rid of un?"

"Better see thy faather fust," Malva insisted to Drusilla.

"Very well, mother; lev' it be as thee do say," replied Drusilla. "I must do as mother do wish," she remarked, helplessly, to the miller.

The miller handed the paper to the pedlar, who replaced it carefully in his pocket. "May so well tell'ee," he remarked, "as you do sim so thick weth wan anawther, that there's onnly wan man in the world I wed sell this paper to: an' tha's—Ezekiel Trevaskis. Ef *he* don't want to buy it from me: nowan else shall. I'll take the things—as I got a right to—an' nowan shaan't stop me!" And with this he hobbled off, muttering to himself.

"Well, b'leeve, thee do knaw all that there es to be knawn at present," said the miller to Drusilla, as the pedlar limped away. "Joe have ben an' cut the country right enough, simmin'ly: an' he've left'ee wethout a stick, or a cup an' saucer, to call thy awn: at layste, so far as he cud do it, the dirty li'l scamp! S'pose he dedn' layve much else behind un," added the miller, "money for'ee to go on weth, like," he ventured, delicately.

"He stawl ayven the few shillin's that I'd saved up for the rent an' me confinement. He ayven cut me best dress an' me best hat to pieces! Hacked them to pieces weth a knife, somehow, so's to layve me nawthin' ayven to wear."

"Good God! what a' ugly li'l devil he must ha' ben! Never heerd o' nawthin' mayner in the whole o' me life! I shud like to kick un from here to the mill, an' back agen, 'till I was tired!" burst out the miller, his big face flaming angrily. "I'm as glad thee hoss-whepped un, Mrs. Rosevear—darn me, ef I arn't!—as ef anywan gov' me a five-pound

note!—*Iss! that I am!*” he repeated emphatically, looking Drusilla now full in the face; his eyes flashing at the flash in hers which his sympathy had evoked.

“Thank’ee, Mr. Pengelly! I’m glad to hear’ee say so!” Drusilla answered promptly: a sense of relief suffusing her mind like a sudden gush of sunshine.

“Well,” remarked the miller, “I do awe un this week’s wages—so fur as the week’s gone,” and he put his hand in his pocket and drew out his purse. “I’ll pay thee instead; to square up matters between us.”

“Give it to mother,” said Drusilla; feeling a delicacy now in taking the money from him herself.

The miller handed the cash to Malva. “Wish it was more,” he remarked.

“Thaank’ee, Mester Pengelly! An’ much obliged to’ee for all thy trouble,” Malva added, as her knotted fingers closed on the coins.

“Don’t mention it! Glad to oblige’ee, or do anything I can for’ee! ’Tis a pleasure. Good night to’ee all!” said the miller heartily.

“Good night, Mr. Pengelly!” cried Morvenna, full of gratitude towards him.

“Good night to’ee, sir; an’ thaank’ee, for thy friendliness!” repeated Malva. “’Tis bra’ an’ kind of’ee, that it es! An’ I shall all’ys say so.”

“Don’t mention it! don’t mention it!”

“Good night, Mr. Pengelly,” said Drusilla, last of all.

“Good night, Mrs. Rosevear!” said the miller, as cheerily as possible. “Don’t lose heart! Things’ll mend! There’s better days comin’!”

And, with this, he walked away with his firm, deliberate tread, and was lost to sight in the windy darkness as soon as he had passed the garden gate.

When the miller had left the garden, and the gate had swung to behind him, the little pedlar, humped skulkingly in the shadow of a patch of thorn-bushes, hobbled away also, as noiselessly as he could go. “Got them all in me clutches, at laast! as I towld Joe I’d have them,” he muttered to

himself as he limped off in the darkness. "An' I'll bleed 'ee 'tell there esn' a drop o' blood in thy body—thee see ef I don't, Ezekiel Trevaskis!" he growled viciously. "I'll bleed'ee wuss than a caa'f, I will! *Iss!* an' wuss than a sticked pig!"

CHAPTER XXXII

PUT TO THE TORTURE

ON the morrow, life at Drusilla's cottage seemed to be as utterly topsy-turvy as the things were in the bedroom on the morning of Joe's departure.

As it was Saturday, Ezekiel would be home sometime in the morning, and would have to be told the news, not only of Joe's flight, but also of the ominous hint thrown out by the pedlar.

And the three women shrank from the task in dread.

They were full of nervous terror, not in the least for their own sakes, but solely for the sake of Ezekiel; for whom they knew the pedlar's hint would be the beginning of a veritable torture.

Still, he would have to be told of it: and that by one of themselves.

Should the pedlar get at Ezekiel first, he would be sure to do his best (out of pure maliciousness) to make the revelation as great a torture as his ingenuity could devise. And this they were determined to shield Ezekiel from, if possible.

So, shortly after breakfast, Morvenna was sent to Newlyn; in order that she might meet Ezekiel and might tell him as much, or as little, of the week's occurrences as she felt inclined to venture on, under the circumstances. In any case, she was to bring him direct to Drusilla's cottage; that he might break his journey there, and then go down to the cove quietly with Morvenna and her mother.

Though not anxious for the task, Morvenna undertook it with obedient willingness, and was presently on her way to

the little fishing-town, with her eyes full of a troubled restlessness it was impossible to conceal.

But, early although Morvenna had started, the pedlar had started even earlier than her.

By the time the red, windy sunrise was flaming across the sky, the pedlar had left his van and was on the way to Newlyn; and by eight o'clock—or shortly after—he was pacing up and down the little granite pier, patiently waiting for the boats to come in.

The acknowledged racers of the fleet came sputtering in first, the foam flying from their bows as they ran up to the harbour through the grey tumbling seas, the gusty flaws whistling shrilly around them. Then came the bulk of the fleet, sailing up anyhow; two or three abreast, single stragglers, a cluster of half-a-dozen: and then a mere crowd—all confused together. Last of all, and at intervals, came the laggards and the lame ducks—boats old, or ill-found, or defective in various ways.

One of the last to arrive was the boat Ezekiel sailed in—oddly enough named *Tempus fugit*—a boat always unlucky, and as invariably late.

It was fully an hour before Ezekiel was ready to start for home: but at last, shortly before ten o'clock, start he did.

The pedlar followed carefully at the crabber's heels until he had left the little fishing-town some distance behind him, and was mounting, slowly and wearily, the long steep hill that here marks the beginning of that irregular plateau which (with occasional depressions, and a central backbone of granite hilltops) may be said to extend from Madron to St. Just.

"Good mornin', Mester Trevaskis! Good mornin' to'ee, sir!" said the pedlar, at last overtaking Ezekiel.

"Mornin', Tom," replied Ezekiel, without any particular heartiness.

"Sorry to see'ee on the boats agen at thy age," said the pedlar. "Thee don't take much rest, for a man gittin' up in years."

"Must work while I can, b'leeve," Ezekiel remarked.

"Well, there's wan thing, thee do manage to make more out of it than most men. Through stickin' to it so stiddy, an' never takin' no rest, thee'rt doin' better than anywan else in Polurrian."

"Don't see that. Sim to me, ef anything, I'm doin' raather wuss."

"Tha's all'ys the way weth you warm wans," said the pedlar, as he shook his head in smiling disapproval: "never willin' to awn up that times es extry good weth'ee."

"Don't knaw, I'm sure, what thee'rt drivin' at," quoth Ezekiel. "S'pose thee think thee'rt talkin' sense, after thy fashion."

"How cud'ee afford to set thy daughter up in house-keepin', as thee ded, ef thee hadn' done better than most in the cove? Why, there esn' anawther man in the cove, to my knowledge . . ."

"Warn't'ee tellin' me, 'tawther day, they'd saved thirty-eight pounds towards it? A liar shud have a better memory. Pull thy wits together, man!"

"I was misinformed, Mester Trevaskis: Joe have set me right sence. I find 'twas *thee* supplied the money," here he lowered his voice confidentially, "out o' thy pickin's from the *Gannet*—such as they was."

"What'ee mayne, man?" cried Ezekiel, turning on him suddenly: the evident disquiet in his face belying the fierceness of his tones.

"Well, tha's puttin' a straight question, ef thee like," said the pedlar. "An' I'll give'ee a straight answer, as between man an' man. Do'ee remember my tellin'ee 'bout a man I see'd from the cliff-top—that man that was robbin' a dead body last April?"

"I remember," said Ezekiel briefly. A sensation of unspeakable terror swept suddenly through his brain. It was like that legend of the man who, for years, pursued a cloaked figure—a figure that everywhere, and persistently, eluded meeting him face to face—and who one day, unexpectedly overtaking it at a corner, found it turn suddenly and front

him and uncloak its face to him : revealing to him no other than the livid *fetch* of himself ! That "other man," on whose secret comradeship in sin with him Ezekiel had supported his courage when desperately beset, was it no other than himself, then, and was he absolutely *alone* ? Ezekiel felt his brain reeling : he staggered like a drunken man.

"As a matter of fact," said the pedlar, gloating over his discomposure, "as a matter of fact, I had a spyglass : an' I watched un through that."

Again there was a pause.

"Well?" said Ezekiel briefly.

"Well?" echoed the pedlar.

"What are'ee drivin' at, man!" cried Ezekiel irritatedly ; his eyes seeking the pedlar's face, and then again wandering away from it, with the restless, shifty glance of fear.

"I thought, as between friends, I'd mention the matter friendly like."

"What matter? Spayke up, an' spayke out, man, caan't'ee!"

"The party I see'd through the spyglass, I do know as well as I know . . . *thee*!"

"Thought thee said the awther day . . ." the words stuck in Ezekiel's throat.

"I onnly done it to try'ee," said the pedlar smoothly. "Thought I'd give'ee a chaance to trust a friend—ef thee wed."

"Well, ef thee know un, go to un, an' tell un so, caan't'ee? What have it got to do weth me?" quoth Ezekiel, weakly querulous.

"Come, now, Mester Trevaskis," said the pedlar suasively, "I arn't a bad wan to dayle weth, after all : not a bit of it. I'd rather do'ee a good turn, than a bad wan, any day. I ben thy friend so far . . . but . . . ef thee drive me too far . . ."

"Spayke out, man! spayke out! Wha's stickin' in thy throt?"

"What need to spayke out plainer! Ha'n't I towld'ee I know the man?"

"What man?" persisted Ezekiel, with the shifty dodging of extreme fear.

"The man I see'd robbin' a dead body from the *Gannet* last April when thee wert whiffin' for makerl off Treen Dinas. I thought, as between friends, I'd mention the matter to'ee friendly like."

"Well, thee've mentioned it," said Ezekiel; feeling as if his life were crumbling away in his hands. "An' now, s'pose, thee'lt find some awther friend thee'd like to mention it to?"

"All depends—all depends!" replied the pedlar, watching him closely.

"There's Isaac Roscorla thee might mention it to. It might int'rest *he*." Ezekiel's face was drawn and haggard, and his eyes were alive with apprehension.

"Or the schoolmaster, or the miller, or the p'leece in Penzaance. It wed int'rest any o' they, I'm thinkin'."

"Well . . . why not try them?"

"I will—ef thee like."

"What it got to do weth *me*—whether *I* like, or no."

"This much! Thee can buy the saycret from me—at a price."

"Why shud *I* buy it from'ee, more'n anywan else?"

"Why? 'Cause 'tes *thy* saycret, man—thy awn disgrace! *Thee'rt* the man I see'd through the spyglass!" said the pedlar. "'Tes from that dead man from the *Gannet* thee got thy money. 'Tes no use denyin' it—I do knaw it for a fact!"

Ezekiel looked in the pedlar's eyes for an instant: and then his glance fell, and he turned as livid as a corpse.

"Well, what'ee got to say?"

Ezekiel hesitated, his lips trembled; he gave a convulsive shudder, and his legs slipped staggeringly.

"How much . . ." began Ezekiel, his voice unnaturally hoarse. He wetted his lips and breathed heavily. "How much . . . thee said somethin' . . . about a price . . . didn'ee?" He articulated the words in a slurred, mangled fashion; seeming to swallow, and that with difficulty, something that

choked in his throat. The timbre of his voice, too, was changed, and that strangely. Something seemed to have stricken his nature to the roots.

"How much?" said the pedlar, with hearty briskness, the crabber's agony in no way affecting him. "Well, I got a bit of a bargain I want to make weth'ee," and he put his hand in his coat-pocket and drew out the bill of sale.

As the pedlar produced the paper, Ezekiel felt a shock of blind horror run through him. Was he to be asked to sign away his freedom?—his soul?—his eternal redemption? His legs seemed suddenly to give way under him: he had to support himself against the hedge as best he could.

"Wha's the matter, man? What'ee stickin' there like that, for?"

"I caan't walk . . . for a few minutes . . ." the slurring in his speech was now pronounced. "Wait . . . 'till I git back the stringth . . . in me legs." The crabber's whole form seemed strangely to collapse, his face sinking in and his lower jaw falling.

"Well, to cut matters short," said the pedlar, with brutal directness, "thy daughter's husband, Joe Rosevear, ben an' skedaddled—gone to America. But I bought all his things from un—all his furniture, I mayne—for haaf a score pounds: here's the bill o' sale of it!" And he unfolded the paper and began to gabble through its contents.

"Lev' it be . . . lev' it be . . ." Ezekiel managed to articulate.

"True, true! Tha's right! Nawthin' like trust between friends! We'll take it as read," said the pedlar; standing in front of Ezekiel, with his legs wide apart, and flourishing the paper in his hand. "Well, that being so, what I got to say es this: ef thee'll gi' me twenty pounds for this here dokkyment, thee can put it in the fire, or do what thee like weth it: an I'll howld me tongue, into the bargain," he added, giving a leering wink, and lowering his voice confidentially, "I'll howld me tongue on that awther matter we was spaykin' of. Honour bright! There's a feer offer, man! Take it, or layve it—I don't keer a pin which thee do!"

Ezekiel leaned against the hedge, his head hanging on his breast; on his face an expression of complete physical collapse.

"Mind! I waan't take a penny less! Twenty pounds, or nawthin'! For that thee git the bill o' sale an' free thy daughter's furniture—every cup an' saucer, an' every stick of it, do belong to me, as it es—an' thee git me on thy side, as mum as a mouse. Iss," he added, rubbing his hands together cheerfully, "thy daughter es knackin' about *my* things at present. Chippin' me cups an' saucers (as likely as not), kickin' the paint off the legs o' me tables an' cheers, an' gen'rally givin' me more trouble than she's wuth, in a manner o' spaykin'. But what do it matter between friends?" and he smiled, if possible, more than ever. "Thee'll be buyin' them back for her, o' coorse—not to spake o' that awther special matter between us—an' then, '*mum's*' the word to ev'rywan, for ever an' ever, aamen!"

"Thee shall ha' the money . . . ef I do ever . . . live to git home," Ezekiel articulated, with mangled indistinctness. "But, for God's sake . . . lemme qua'at . . . lemme qua'at . . . for . . . minute or two."

"Right, you! Tha's agreed between us, then! Twenty pounds, an' all ovver, all feer an' square!" And the pedlar held out his hand to grip that of Ezekiel.

"Caan't'ee see, man . . . got as much . . . can do . . . to stand 't all."

"Thee musn' crack up, owld friend; thee'rt too vallyable to me an' awthers. Must try to git'ee home somehow," the pedlar muttered, watching him. "Darn it all! wish there was somewan in sight."

At this moment, scanning the highway carefully in all directions, the pedlar became aware of a female figure in the distance: some one approaching from the direction of Polurrian and Choone.

He waved his hand to her anxiously; calling, at the top of his voice, "Come here, wust 'a, you! *A man took ill!*" he bawled.

Down the road the figure came running rapidly, and, as

he watched her, it suddenly flashed on the pedlar that this was no other than Ezekiel's daughter Morvenna : the little spitfire who, last night, had clapped her hands so gleefully when the miller had held him up in a fashion so undignified.

But there was no opportunity, just now, to resent grievances of this kind. He must accept her help, and make the best of it.

"Hurry up !" he bawled : "man took ill !"

As she came running along breathlessly, Morvenna presently recognised that it was the pedlar hailing her : and, almost at the same instant, the thought stabbed her like a knife, that possibly the "*man ill*" was her father himself !

She rushed down the long highway like one suddenly gone crazy : her eyes dazed, her breath coming in quick, short pants, and her heart beating as furiously as if it would burst through her bodice.

"Father ! dear father ! what's the matter with you ?" she cried excitedly, running up to him and laying his hanging head on her shoulder.

"'Tis all right—he do know all, me dear—*everything* !" cackled the pedlar. "An' we're the best o' friends now, thy faather an' I ! Arn't us, Mester Trevaskis ?" he asked, turning to Ezekiel.

"Iss," groaned Ezekiel : "iss . . . best o' . . . friends."

"He ben took a bit poorly through hearin' the whisht news about Joe," said the pedlar to Morvenna, as he watched her kissing and fondling her father. "But he'll soon be all right agen : waan't'ee, owld friend ?" And he thrus this face to within half a foot of that of Ezekiel.

"Iss," groaned Ezekiel : "onnly git me . . . indoors."

"That bill o' sale he's goin' to buy back from me for twenty pounds, me dear. Arn't'ee, owld friend ? Just say '*iss* / ' ef thee can manage it."

"Iss," moaned Ezekiel : "iss . . . git me . . . indoors . . . I want . . . to go to bed . . . to slaip . . ." he muttered heavily.

"Thee heard un ? He've promised, mind ! 'Tis a bargain ?" said the pedlar. "Thee'rt a witness that he promised me ; arn't'ee, me dear ?"

"Yes, yes," cried Morvenna, racked with intolerable anguish. "Give him your arm, and I'll give him mine: we must get him indoors somehow."

And one on either side of him, half supporting half dragging him—his feet trailing heavily, his head hanging on his breast—Morvenna and the pedlar, after a period that seemed to the girl interminable, managed to bring Ezekiel to the door of Drusilla's house.

When Malva and Drusilla perceived the group approaching the cottage—the little pedlar awkwardly doing his best to support a man nearly a foot and a half taller than himself; Morvenna, her eyes watering and blinking frequently; and, in the middle, Ezekiel swaying and staggering like a drunken man—the two women screamed affrightedly and at once rushed out to assist.

"Wha's the matter weth un?" quavered Malva. "Took bad, are'ee, faather?"

"Who done it? Was it *thee*?" Drusilla questioned angrily; pushing away the pedlar and taking his place.

"Yes! it was *him*!" cried Morvenna vehemently. "He met father and frightened him—upset him in some way. He has been worrying father about money," she explained. And she hastily described how she had met them: her father leaning against the hedge, ill and scarcely able to speak, and the pedlar harping on some promise that he said had been made to him. "It is all *his* doing! I hate him!" she cried passionately.

"Hate me or no," said the pedlar, following them into the cottage, "Ezekiel have promised to buy back the bill o' sale from me. Twenty pounds he's goin' to give me for it, for raisons knawn to ourselves! Arn't'ee, owld friend—'tes a promise, esn't it?"

"Iss . . . gi' the money . . . git rid of un . . . want to slaip," came brokenly and indistinctly from the lips of the crabber, as he sank heavily into a chair, his head falling on his breast.

"Come in agen later—this ayv'nin'—any time. Thee shall have the money, ef he've promised it," cried Malva agitatedly. "But layve un now! Do'ee go—there's a good

Christian! Else he'll die on our haands!" she wailed, watching her husband.

"And if he does," cried Morvenna, "you shall never touch a penny of it! We'll swear together—all of us!—that you've killed him, you little wretch! Yes! and we'll stick to it, too!" she cried passionately. "You shall be hunted out of the parish like a rat, that you shall! Go!—out of the house!—or I'll fetch the miller to whip you out of it! Get out!" and she snatched up the heavy kitchen poker and advanced towards him as spiritedly as if she would strike him down in another instant.

The pedlar began backing away and retreating before the girl in whom the protective instinct thus defiantly asserted itself—flooding her nature with its vital force till she felt as fierce as a lioness—but, on the doorstep, he halted and cried to them menacingly, "I'll come for the money this ayv'nin'—an' I mayne to have it, too! Better have it ready—or else it'll be wuss for all of ee!" And, with that, he hobbled away, muttering to himself.

CHAPTER XXXIII

CONFIDENCES

LATER in the day—about the middle of the afternoon—when Ezekiel had been helped upstairs and put to bed, Drusilla went down to her father's cottage to fetch the hated money; of which she was now almost as much afraid as Malva was. Ezekiel, in his mangled and painfully difficult speech, had told them to have the money ready for the pedlar when he called, that they might redeem the bill of sale and promptly get rid of him: and, under the circumstances, Drusilla could do nothing but obey.

As she was returning with the twenty sovereigns in her pocket, she met the schoolmaster wandering restlessly along the edge of the stream. "Is anything the matter?" he

asked anxiously. "Anything happened to your father? What has become of Morvenna? I haven't seen her since yesterday."

Drusilla explained to him that her father, as he was returning from Newlyn that morning, had been taken ill, "almost as ef he'd had a stroke," and that Morvenna and her mother were up at the cottage in Choone bottoms engaged in looking after him until he could be brought home.

"Have you had the doctor for him, yet?" asked the schoolmaster.

"No! he caan't do no good," said Drusilla.

"Shall I fetch one for you?"

"No — don't knaw — thee can ask mother," answered Drusilla, wavering and undecided, for many conflicting reasons.

"Shall I go up with you now? I should like to, if you don't object."

"Come, ef thee like," said Drusilla indifferently.

So they walked together up to the cottage in Choone bottoms.

After a little talk with the schoolmaster, Malva agreed that he should fetch the doctor from Newlyn if he would; Morvenna being particularly anxious that they should have medical assistance, and Ezekiel, when they put the question to him, making no objection.

"Thee go weth Mester Richards, me dear, ef thee like: a bit o' walk'll do'ee good," said Malva to Morvenna.

"Iss; thee go," said Drusilla kindly. "Father'll be all right; an' the walk waan't harm'ee."

Morvenna accordingly put on her hat and jacket and set off with the schoolmaster, full of agitating thoughts.

For hours she had been anxiously debating in her mind whether it was not her duty to confess to the schoolmaster the position of affairs — all its gloomy and embarrassing entanglements and all the latent threats in it — and leave it to him to decide how far he felt justified in holding to his engagement to her under the circumstances.

With her scanty mental outfit, and her narrow and per-

functory intellectual training—enlarged slightly, though both had been, by her education as a teacher—Morvenna was as unable to state the larger questions of conduct, as she was mentally to apprehend the complex issues of life. Her only guide was the average conscience of the community: a conscience whose standard of morals and whose spiritual platform were those of the creed popularly known as *Christianity*: the said creed being accepted with the slightest mental gloss, and with little, if with any, subtilising insight. Hitherto, the “rule of thumb” decisions of this conscience had answered her needs without any sense of insufficiency. But now she found herself confronted by a problem so unusual, that the answers scheduled (so to speak) in the typical catechism of the community no longer seemed to her adequate, or even pertinent, to her needs. She felt suddenly, like one shipwrecked on the infinite sea of life, without a compass or a chart to guide her, and without even the friendly stars. And in the perplexity of what seemed to her her loneliness and desolation, she was disquieted to an extent that was almost unendurable.

She could remember no case exactly parallel to her own; and no popular gloss, or commentary, on other lives known to her, that she could apply suitably to the peculiar circumstances in which she was placed. Her decision must be a purely personal and individual one: the creation of a standard for herself, and an adherence to it *if possible*; and in the confusion and perplexity that resulted from the demand, she fell into a mood of such emotional agitation that the schoolmaster became aware of it before they had walked a hundred yards.

“What’s the matter, my pet? What’s worrying you so much?” he asked, with loving solicitude, watching her face anxiously.

“I’m afraid, dear,” said Morvenna, avoiding his eyes (her voice shaking and something like a sob creeping into it). “I’m afraid, dear,” she faltered, “we shall have to give each other up.”

“Why?” asked the schoolmaster, glancing at her with

a startled look. "What has happened that such a thought should ever enter your head?" Suddenly his voice grew graver, with a tremulous note of trouble in it, "Unless you mean, Morvenna," and he tried to look in her eyes, "unless you mean that you want to be free from me—for your own sake, and not for mine."

"No, no, dear! Oh no, I don't want to give you up! How could I?" she exclaimed, lovingly anxious to reassure him. "It would break my heart, I think! Oh, I think it would, indeed!" she cried, lifting her eyes to his; and he could see that they were rapidly filling with tears.

"Then, why talk of it, my darling?" urged the schoolmaster, much perturbed.

"Because . . . because . . ." she faltered; and then her voice broke into a veritable gasping sob. "Because, dear . . . you may want to get rid of me yourself!"

"Why?" asked the schoolmaster, with a startled intonation. "What has happened? What is it? Why should I want to give you up?"

"Because . . ." and, with this, she poured out her story, in a rush of words that, in its way, was as irresistible and as impetuous as the rush of waters from a bursting mill-dam, battered down by a freshet.

The schoolmaster listened, with close and painful attention, as she related to him, as coherently as her agitation would permit, the pitiful story of her father's temptation and his fall: of his sin, prompted solely by his love for his children: of the beginning of his punishment, at first secret and inward; presently taking the form of an anguished torture from without: and now, as late as this morning, of the final attack by the pedlar—an attack that threatened to end in the shaming of all of them and in the general and irretrievable ruin of their lives.

She explained that neither Ezekiel nor Malva had benefited by the money: that they had not touched a penny of it, loathing it from the first: and that she, herself, had refused even to handle the hated coins, feeling towards them a repugnance impossible to overcome. But the fatal urgency

of sordid needs on the part of her sister, unhappily had led to the hoard being infringed on ; and through this, and Joe's vindictiveness in the angry hours before his flight, the pedlar had managed to obtain a clue to the painful secret, and was now using it against them with all the rancour he was capable of.

All this, in her own agitated phraseology, and in the clearest way her mind was capable of focussing it, Morvenna laid before the schoolmaster, revealing all and concealing nothing. She felt, the while, as if the shame of the disclosure would break her heart : but she was resolute to endure the pang of it, and to face the result of the confession, rather than have their love prove a thing contemptible in its foundations—empty of trust and of self-respect, a mere mockery and a sham.

In her girlish way, she was realising (dimly and imperfectly) that, to ensure for it a long and happy life, love demands something more than desire, however vehement ; more even than a swift recognition of sympathies—however absorbing and poignant these may be. She was realising that the highest love needs, above everything, a sympathetic comprehension of the nature it would respond to : a comprehension whose trust (deliberate, and not to be shaken) shall widen as inevitably with every widening of knowledge, as it does with every widening of emotional development. Above all, she was realising (however inadequately) that love based solely upon a single side of life—be it the sensuous form, or the nobler phantasy—carries fatally within itself the warrant of its own decay : and, in its ruin, may calamitously drag down with it even more than in its heyday it was competent to build up.

The pitiful conflict within her, had been increasingly evident in many ways as she had proceeded with her story, and when she finally broke down into a perfect passion of tears, the schoolmaster, his arms around her, laid her head on his shoulder lovingly, and assured her that, as far as she was concerned, he considered her free from the slightest stain. He asseverated that the idea of giving

her up for the sin of another—a sin in which she had not participated even with the tips of her fingers—was the last thing he would think of doing—it would be as base as killing a child! She was his—she had all his love—and she was to be his wife presently. These things were settled definitely: and nothing could ever shake them!

And, presently, in the satisfying assurance of this—with his arm around her, her head on his shoulder, and his lips caressing hers—Morvenna gradually ceased her sobbing and allowed herself to be comforted: feeling that here was a man to be worshipped, and that worship him she did with all her heart!

“Oh, my love, oh, my love, I *do* love you!” she cried to him.

“I’m as sure of it,” responded the schoolmaster, pressing her to him closely, “I’m as sure of it, my darling, as I am that I’m alive!”

Their talk, after this, as they proceeded on their way to Newlyn, was dictated rather by the schoolmaster’s worldly-wisdom than by their deep and trustful affection for each other; which now, once more, was restfully content.

The schoolmaster would not have been a man of flesh-and-blood—that proud, assertive, pleasure-seeking animal that a man is in the main, however circumstances may differentiate him—if he had not felt a slight flavour of regret that the girl he had chosen for his wife should (however unavoidably) be mixed up with the tangle of incidents he had just become aware of. Ezekiel’s sin and its consequences (Drusilla’s desertion being, perhaps, one of them) were by no means pleasant thoughts to linger over: and the schoolmaster saw clearly the objectionable results that might ensue if the crabber’s transgression should become generally known.

Discussing the matter with Morvenna with reasonable frankness, he impressed on her to keep in the future (as she had done in the past) absolutely clear from any complicity in the affair of the money. Rather than she should be exposed to the temptation of having to handle it (in case Ezekiel’s illness should prove to be a lengthy one) he

suggested that she should endeavour to obtain her parents' consent to her being married at the earliest convenient opportunity.

"You will be eighteen just before Easter," he remarked; "why not let us be married at Easter, and free you in this way? That would give me the right, as his son-in-law, to protect your father, and also to assist him to the full extent of my means. And I think that you and I, dear, could so manage matters between us that neither he nor your mother should want for anything, and yet that they should be freed, at the same time, from that terrible temptation always assailing them in the background. You would be willing, if your parents would consent, wouldn't you, my pet?"

"Yes!" replied Morvenna. "If they will let us be married at Easter, I shall be as pleased, dear, as you will be!"

"Then that's settled," said the schoolmaster. "I fancy, between us we can manage to obtain their consent somehow. At any rate, we will both do our best to get it, won't we?"

"Yes, dear, we will!" Morvenna answered lovingly. A life spent at the side of the schoolmaster—and that as his *wife*—was her ideal of the fullest happiness that was possible for her in the world: and at the mere prospect of it, her heart began to flutter with delight.

The doctor they had gone in search of, they were so fortunate as to find at home; and, as he promised to call at the cottage some time during the evening, Morvenna and the schoolmaster returned to Choone and reported their success to Malva with the feeling that their afternoon had been thoroughly well spent.

Before he left the cottage, the schoolmaster remarked to Morvenna that he would like to have a talk with her sister Drusilla: would Morvenna ask her if she would mind coming to the gate with him that they might have a few minutes' quiet conversation together?

Drusilla wondered what the conversation was likely to be about, but consented, and went out to the gate with him as he had requested.

At once plunging into the matter that was uppermost in

his thoughts, the schoolmaster told Drusilla that Morvenna had confided everything to him ("Oh, she has! has she?" interjected Drusilla) and that he wanted to give them a bit of advice, if Drusilla would not mind listening to it.

Drusilla answering neither "yes" nor "no": the schoolmaster accordingly proceeded to give her the benefit of his suggestions.

What he had to say to her, stated briefly, amounted to this:—

The pedlar having proved himself so savagely vindictive, any trap that could be laid for him seemed to be justified: the schoolmaster therefore advised Drusilla so to arrange matters that the promised payment to him should be made openly, in the presence of her mother and herself: that the twenty pounds should only be handed to him after Malva had told him clearly that it was a portion of the money obtained from the dead man's belt: and, further, that he should be given definitely to understand that, while ten of the sovereigns were to redeem the bill of sale, the other ten were given to him purely as "hush money"—that he might keep the subject of the appropriated belt as a secret between themselves. "If you carry the matter through strictly on these lines," said the schoolmaster, "the pedlar will have 'compounded a felony,' as it is termed: he will have accepted money to hold his tongue with regard to a punishable offence, and for this he will be liable to fine and imprisonment, should the matter at any time come into a court of law. When all is over—when he has pocketed the money and you have burned the bill of sale—you must give him to understand, as clearly as possible, that his position in the eye of the law is perfectly well known to you; and that, if he tries in future to annoy your father, you are quite determined to let the law take its course and he will have to bear *his* special share of the punishment—*fine and imprisonment*, you will remind him, being what this amounts to. Do you think you can remember all this?" the schoolmaster asked her. "And are you willing to carry the matter through in this way?"

Yes, Drusilla thought she could remember it, if he would repeat it over again to her : and as for being willing, she was more than willing, she would be *delighted* to trap the little pedlar in any way whatever !

“Of course,” remarked the schoolmaster, “you will be doing nothing but what you have a perfect right to do. Your father’s regrettable act you are in no way responsible for : and that you should try to protect him, as far as it lies in your power, against a man notoriously so unscrupulous as the pedlar—especially, seeing that your father is too ill to protect himself—is only what would be expected from you under the circumstances ; and I am quite sure no one would blame you for it.”

The schoolmaster’s desk-style was rather a weariness to Drusilla—she found herself wondering whether he talked in this way to Morvenna, and if so, how on earth Morvenna could endure it—and his defence of her, in anticipation, against possible criticisms, she simply did not listen to, thinking of quite other matters. She was content to know that the little pedlar was about to step into a trap, and that, in future, if he should try to injure or annoy them, he would find out that he was practically in the same boat as they were. In spite of his cleverness, he would now be compelled to hold his tongue : if not for their sake, at any rate, for his own ! And her heart leaped with a fierce and almost savage gratification.

As the schoolmaster again went over his suggestions to her, Drusilla listened to him with close attention, devouring every word greedily, and at last felt sure that she thoroughly comprehended them.

“Iss, iss : I understand ! In any case, I’ll do it !” she remarked eagerly, and a little impatiently, anxious now to get rid of him. “Good afternoon, Mr. Richards, and thank’ee for thy advice !” and, with that, she turned and went indoors.

Meanwhile the schoolmaster, as he walked homewards through the October sunset—the great masses of cloud tossed and tumbled overhead, and the wind whining and wailing and sighing ceaselessly around him—felt depressed into a mood in thorough harmony with the hour : a mood in which

the light seemed narrowing just as drearily, and the shadows deepening as stealthily and almost as inevitably.

He was overcome by something like personal humiliation, at being mixed up with a tangle of incidents in which the elements of disgrace were so obviously latent.

True, he held Morvenna blameless in the matter: as he had held her from the first, and that unfalteringly. He would not have altered her individuality by a touch of light or shade, by a hair'sbreadth of change in her from what she was now—with her seventeen-and-a-half summers and her exquisite gift of loving—even had the power been bestowed on him for his testing.

But the sin of her father, and the shadows gathering threateningly around the cottage—these were things that he was neither glad nor proud of: and, in an environment such as this, her lustre seemed to be dimmed perceptibly.

He even found himself wondering how he should act if he discovered that the circle lighted up by her consciousness was so narrow that, for all practical purposes, she was entirely at the mercy of the tribal gods of her parents, was a mere slave to the conventions to which they had tabued her. If, on finding herself a wife, with alien ideals to consider—the tribal gods of her husband's training and aspirations—she should be harassed into the most fretful and unhappy of lives, how could he manage to hold his own in the world? he groaned drearily.

And, for the first time, the idea of his marriage made him tremble.

He struggled with the feeling, which he was well aware was an ungenerous one, but the restlessly introspective nature of the student—the man of books, the man of documents and of abstract problems—was not an easy one to quiet in its intellectual vagaries. His mind kept on presenting and weighing these ideas, discussing and analysing and subtly discriminating them, till the tumult of his thoughts became almost a torture to him, and he longed heartily to be indoors and under the influence of his books—to whose soothing, magic spell he was always glad to surrender himself. In the

cloisteral world of books, a man can always be sure of finding sympathy and companionship, and here he can feed a mood, or, if need be, create it, with the certainty of being able to control it when necessary, and with no other spectator of his whims and their consequences than the lamp staring from the table or the clock ticking at his side. To be again in this haven of the student and the man of dreams, the schoolmaster hurried homewards as rapidly as possible; feeling that merely to glance at the books on their shelves would in itself be an anodyne—even, perhaps, a tonic.

But he had still a good half-hour's walk in front of him: and in that time his thoughts played him many trying pranks.*

At last, however, he settled down definitely to the conclusion that you can't gather up spilled water by saying a prayer over it; and that he must deal with the facts of life as they actually fronted him, and not as he personally would have arranged them had he been asked to place them before the footlights.

Morvenna he meant to marry—that decision was beyond dispute. A life without her would be worse than a life maimed by the loss of a limb: and not even as a mere exercise of the imagination, could he endure the idea of a deprivation so fatal to him.

The father with his burden of sin, and the sister with her burden of sorrow, must be accepted as gloomy figures in the background of his life; but in the foreground he would have Morvenna! and he would rest content with that.

The owls hooted eerily among the trees at the head of the valley, the wind wailed and lamented, the sea thundered at the mouth of the cove, but the schoolmaster had poised his thoughts firmly on his love for Morvenna, and from this nothing could now dislodge them: they were there, and there they would rest!

CHAPTER XXXIV

TWO WOMEN AND A MAN

ABOUT half-an-hour after the schoolmaster had left the cottage, the doctor's ancient gig drew up at the gate.

According to the women's interpretation of his behaviour, the doctor seemed to be greatly puzzled by Ezekiel's collapse. As a matter of fact, he was not so much puzzled as surprised. He recognised it as so clearly a case of nervous breakdown, that he was frankly curious to discover how it could have been caused. That a man living such an open-air existence as the crabber, not given to excess on any side of life, and presumably not harassed by acute mental anxieties, should collapse as Ezekiel had done, struck the doctor as somewhat strange. Had he known of the crabber's many sleepless nights, of his intense fits of mental and spiritual anguish, and of his moody and almost morbid hankering after solitude, the functional derangement and consequent mal-nutrition that had ensued, would have explained everything to the doctor's mind and the case would have been clear to him. As matters stood, however, the collapse certainly puzzled him. He decided that it must be due to long-continued under-feeding, and to excess of worry in some form — probably sordid and domestic. It was possible that the effects of these had been considerably aggravated by prolonged exposure on the fishing-boats during the recent stormy weather: perhaps, also, to his having had to work beyond his strength—seeing the enfeebled condition of his system. In any case, as far as the winning of his bread was concerned, Ezekiel was out of the battle at present: and out of it he was likely to remain for many months to come. Whether he would ever enter it again with anything like his old vigour, depended entirely on the care with which (during the next month or two) he abstained from exhausting effort and from worry or excitement—

“worry, or excitement, of *any kind!*” the doctor repeated emphatically. To think of returning to the fishing-boats this winter, would be madness. He was physically incapable of enduring the strain and the exposure: and if he were insane enough to attempt it, in the face of the warning he had just had, his reward would probably be a stroke of paralysis. Quiet and rest he *must* have—that was imperative! “Rest” must be his motto: rest always, and rest everywhere. And the luxury of worry, which he had evidently been over-indulging in of late, he must abstain from as rigidly as if the worry were gin or brandy, and he wanted to escape an attack of *delirium tremens*.

Malva listened to the doctor laying down the law on these lines, in much the same spirit as the wife of a consumptive London clerk—who listens, with an aching heart, while the doctor suggests blandly, that her husband should try to winter in a warm southern climate, or should take a voyage to Australia and back to brace him up.

Cessation from active work she might compel him to, after a fashion: though where the bread for the household was to come from in the interval, was a side of the question that the doctor had overlooked. But *quiet*—rest of mind, complete freedom from mental worry—it was as impossible for Malva to procure this for him, or, indeed, for Ezekiel to grasp it for himself, as it would be for a wounded cormorant to settle down in a farmyard and pick up its living thankfully among the pullets and the pigs.

Malva did not discuss the matter with the doctor, aware, as she was, of the utter uselessness of doing so. She merely asked him if he thought it would harm Ezekiel if he were moved down to the cottage in the cove in a day or two—Ezekiel feeling in Drusilla’s cottage like a man in a pest-house: everything here being to him an eyesore and an offence; all the furniture, the very cup and saucer that he used, reminding him of the hated source from whence it had been procured.

“No,” said the doctor, “it won’t harm him in the least. If it will ease his mind in any way, move him as soon as you

like. But don't let him walk—even if he thinks he is able to. Take him down in a cab, or in a waggon, in a cart, or in anything. Remember," he remarked again, as he was getting into his gig, "what he wants is absolute rest, and the most perfect quiet that you can procure him. Strain, or worry of any kind, will be as bad as poison for him at present!"

"Iss, doctor, I'll remember," Malva answered sadly, as the doctor touched his horse and rapidly drove away.

As the doctor left the cottage, the dusk was submerging the world like a tide rising rapidly: wave after wave of shadow, of growing density and volume, seeming to flow across the valleys and deepen there steadily. Already, near the spinneys and in the hollows of the hills, the darkness was as densely black as it would be in the open at midnight: and though the tops of the hills were still visible against the sky, their lower slopes and the moors at their feet were an indistinguishable lake of shadows.

To Morvenna, looking out from the lighted interior of the kitchen, the bottoms, with their pool of darkness rising almost to the skyline, seemed a place of terrors and surprises, of secret ambushes and things to tremble at: and as she listened to the hooting of an owl from a distant clump of trees and the grievous lamenting and wailing of the wind, her heart seemed to constrict with sadness and her breath almost to come with pain.

As she stood here staring into the shadows, she was suddenly aware of a blotch of blackness that became detached, as it were, from the less sooty dusk, and in its odd, humped formlessness began to steal towards the cottage, much as if it were an imp, or something equally uncanny, begotten by the gathering shadows and compact of all the evil in them.

As the blotch of shadow stealthily approached the cottage, Morvenna presently realised that it must be the hated little pedlar, and, turning towards Malva, she cried to her excitedly, "Mother, the pedlar's coming! he's almost at the gate! I shan't stay in the kitchen to see him," she added nervously: "I shall go upstairs to keep father company, while he's here."

"Iss, thee do so, me cheeld," replied Malva; to whom facing the unhappiness that others shrank from, would by no means be a novelty among the grey scenes of memory. "Thy faather do like to hear'ee singin', b'leeve," she added, as Morvenna stood at the foot of the steep little stairs; "sing to un, me dear, while we're down here talkin'. That es, ef he'll lev'ee. P'raps then he waan't notice the voices in the kitchen."

"Yes, mother, I will; if he'll let me," replied Morvenna; tip-toeing upstairs as rapidly as possible, as at that moment she heard the pedlar rapping at the door.

At the soft *rat-tat*, a strange, withering touch seemed to pass across the faces of both the women in the kitchen: the glimmer of fright in their eyes, and the fading of the colour from their lips, being, perhaps, the most noticeable signs of it.

"Oppen the door to un, Drusilla," said Malva, to her daughter.

Drusilla went forward and opened the door.

And immediately Morvenna, who had been listening intently for this signal, started singing to her father in her sweet girlish voice: a voice which, perfunctorily though it had been educated (and that merely in the ordinary singing-lessons of the school), had still in its manipulation a touch of training and of method.

Morvenna had chosen a hymn full of hope and jubilation, and in which her voice could ring out with sufficient clearness and volume to fill the little bedroom to the exclusion of other sounds: and the words were even audible in the kitchen under her, as the girl's voice rose up sweetly and purely:—

*"The whole world was lost in the darkness of sin—
The Light of the world is Jesus!
Like sunshine at noonday His glory shone in—
The Light of the world is Jesus!
Come to the Light! 'tis shining for thee:
Sweetly the Light has dawned upon me:
Once I was blind, but now I can see—
The Light of the world is Jesus!"*

Meanwhile in the kitchen, in which the candle was now lighted, the pedlar, as he limped in, was demanding harshly, "Well, got the money all right for me, missis? I ha'n't got much spare time on me hands." And with this he seated himself, uninvited, in a chair near the fire, Drusilla closing the door carefully behind him.

"Iss, the money's here," answered Malva meekly. "Got it in thy pocket, b'leeve, ha'n't'ee, Drusilla?"

"Iss, I got it all right," said Drusilla. And seating herself in a chair, on the opposite side of the fireplace, she leisurely took the money from her pocket and, as leisurely, began to count it out on her lap. That she might remember the schoolmaster's lesson with anything like clearness, and stand the strain of acting a part that was dictated from without, and was in no way the deliberate outcome of her temperament, it was essential that she should exercise the sternest self-control. This she recognised with a sense of excessive nervousness: afraid to make a single move that her lesson did not warrant. And in the face of the watchful and hated little pedlar—whose mere presence disturbed her to the very marrow of her bones—this effort at self-control had to be so deliberate that it taxed her nature to its fullest extent, as she was aware in every fibre.

The pedlar sat rubbing his dirty hands together, his shoulders humped up almost to his ears, and his little beady eyes fixed watchfully on the coins.

"Twenty suvrins it was to be, so father said," remarked Drusilla, looking across at the pedlar.

"Iss, tha's right, me dear! twenty suvrins."

Drusilla counted them over carefully. "One, two . . . seven . . . twelve . . . fourteen . . . sixteen . . . nineteen, twenty. Iss, I got them all right. And now, where's the bill o' sale?"

The pedlar produced the paper from the breast-pocket of his coat, and held it in his hand, partly unfolded.

"O' coorse," remarked Drusilla, to Tom the Hangman, "thee knaw how we come by this here money: every penny of it come out o' that dead man's bilt."

"Iss, iss, I knaw. No need at all to go into it, me dear," interposed the pedlar, watching the gold greedily.

Malva sat rigid and silent at the end of the kitchen-table, her eyes behind her spectacles blurring mistily. But Drusilla persisted, clinging to the terms of her lesson, "Not a suvrin of it was come by honestly, so to spaik."

"Iss, iss, I knaw!" repeated the pedlar impatiently.

Malva lifted her apron furtively, her hard, knotted hands shaking like an aspen-leaf, and secretly wiped the tears from her eyes. Her heart was swelling with an anguish incapable of utterance, and a "lump" was rising in her throat and almost choking her. She would have given half a week's food to have been able to weep openly, or to sob aloud for a minute, to ease her burdened heart.

And, meanwhile, Morvenna's voice floated down to them silverly, sounding at Ezekiel's bedside the pathetic cry of resignation:—

*"My God, my Father, while I stray
Far from my home, on life's rough way,
Oh, teach me from my heart to say—
Thy will be done!"*

"Well," resumed Drusilla, drawing a long, sighing breath, in order to relieve the tension on her nerves, "well . . . ten pounds es for the bill o' sale, b'leeve."

"Iss, tha's right!" remarked the pedlar eagerly.

"And ten pounds es for '*hush money*'—to pay'ee for keepin' thy mouth shut."

"Iss; tha's so! Thee got it all so pat, me dear, as ef thee'd larned it out of a book!" said the pedlar, leaning towards her with a little sneering laugh.

"Well, give mother the bill o' sale—an' here's the ten pounds for it."

"The money fust, plaise," said the pedlar sharply.

"I'll put the money in thy hand when thee give mother the bill o' sale. Not a minute before!" replied Drusilla stubbornly. "Here 'tes!" and she extended her hand with her fingers closed on the coins tightly. "Thee can

howld me hand while thee'rt passin' the paper, ef thee'rt frightened about it. But thee'll have to give over the bill o' sale to mother, all fair an' square," she insisted nervously, "'fore I trust'ee weth the ten pounds: like it or no!"

The pedlar stared at her with a scowl, and for a moment fingered the paper hesitatingly. But as he glanced at Malva's face, down which the tears were trickling slowly, he seemed to be reassured, or, at least, satisfied in his thoughts.

Making a hasty, darting clutch at Drusilla's extended hand (over which his thin fingers closed like a vice) with the other hand he tossed the bill of sale on the table.

"Mother!" cried Drusilla.

Malva seized the paper obediently, and immediately passed it over to her daughter's disengaged hand.

At the same instant Drusilla unclosed her fingers, and (not without an involuntary shudder) let the pedlar scoop up the coins from her palm.

The moment her hand was free, Drusilla, with a movement of the most feverish haste, rolled up her apron with the remaining coins in it. And then, while the pedlar was counting the sovereigns and examining them, biting each between his teeth and weighing it carefully in his dirty fingers, she glanced hurriedly through the contents of the paper her mother had handed her.

As the pedlar lifted his head—it all took place in about a minute—Drusilla nodded rapidly and reassuringly to Malva: and then (remarking hurriedly, "Iss, 'tes all right, mother!") she twisted up the paper and thrust it into the fire.

"Aw! what'ee done that for?" cried the pedlar, jumping to his feet. But the paper had vanished into nothingness even as the words were being uttered. Taken aback at a proceeding which he was at a loss to seize the significance of, he repeated his question angrily, "What possessed'ee to do that?"

Ignoring him, Drusilla remarked calmly to Malva, "Now then, mother, tha's out o' the way! Every stick o' furniture

in the house es me awn agen!" she added, lifting her head and glancing around the kitchen.

"Wha's the mainin' o' this?" demanded the pedlar, with bullying fierceness; suspicious that the women had laid some trap for him. "Darn'ee, 'tes no use you wemmin tryin' to chayte me!" His face dark with rage, his eyes glowing evilly, he cried savagely (at one moment turning towards Malva, the next shaking his clenched fist passionately at Drusilla) "Ef ayther o'ee try to chayte me out o' me money, darn'ee!—ef I don't git they ten pounds thy snaik of a faather promised me, I'll have un in to Penzaance jail before the night es out! Iss—livin' or dyin', I don't keer a button!—I'll have his darned owld carcass in there, cuss'ee! ef I have to hale un in by the heer of his head!"

"Thee shall ha' the money right enough," Drusilla replied calmly. "Father promised it to'ee, b'leeve; an' I got it here to give'ee."

"Give un the money, an' lev' un go!" quavered Malva from her corner.

"Iss, darn'ee! thee better do it, an' that putty quick; else it'll be the wuss for'ee!" growled the pedlar bullily.

"O' coorse: we do knaw that: else thee wedn' git it. But, bein' as matters are," remarked Drusilla, as if reluctantly, "s'pose I'd better hand it ovver; though it do go agen the grain."

"Iss, that thee had! agen the grain or no!" the pedlar retorted, nodding his head at her menacingly.

"Well," said Drusilla with another long, sighing breath, "o' coorse thee do knaw, as well as we do, that all thaise"—and here she held up her apron, its pouched contents gathered together as in a bag—"that all thaise (every penny of them, mind!) come out o' the bilt o' that dead man. Thee don't mind takin' them because o' that, do'ee?"

"Not a bit, cuss it all! Why shud I?" cried the pedlar.

"An' thee knaw they're for '*hush money*,' to pay'ee for howldin' thy tongue—howldin' thy tongue about the bilt, an' how father come by it? Thee onderstand that?" demanded Drusilla with careful slowness.

"Iss, iss—I onderstand!" retorted the pedlar impatiently. "Gi's the money—an' howld thy tongue! Here! hand it ovver!"

"Tha's all right, then; so long as we onderstand," remarked Drusilla, untwisting her apron and holding it up with both her hands. "There's the payment for howldin' thy tongue—an' ev'ry suvrin of it stawlen money, mind!" And she held out her apron that he might seize the coins himself.

"Iss, iss, darn'ee! shut up thy clack!" the pedlar cried brutally, as he counted the coins and pocketed them.

And, the while, from the chamber Morvenna's voice rang out sweetly:—

*"He leadeth me! Oh, blessed thought!
Oh, words with heavenly comfort fraught!
Whate'er I do, where'er I be,
Still 'tis God's hand that leadeth me!
He leadeth me! He leadeth me!
By His own hand He leadeth me!"*

As the pedlar now turned on his heel to leave the cottage, Drusilla remarked to him, in a tone of assumed carelessness, "S'pose thee know how we do stand to wan anawther in this matter now? Thee'rt prepared for all the consequences, s'pose, o' what thee've done?"

"Eh? What'ee mayne?" retorted the pedlar, turning and fronting her; something peculiar in her tone striking him unpleasantly.

"I ben consultin' weth a friend about thee an' ourselves . . ."

"What friend?" demanded the pedlar: his eyes turning from one to the other of the women with a close, watchful scrutiny, full of suspicion.

"A friend who's more'n a bit up in they law matters," replied Drusilla: "got them all at his finger-ends, he bein' in the business."

"What have the law got to do weth a saycret between ourselves: a saycret between *friends*?" he remarked, with wheedling softness.

Drusilla went on, without heeding the interruption, the note of triumph distinctly noticeable in the inflection of her voice. "And he do tell me, by doin' what thee just ben an' done—takin' stawlen money to pay'ee for keepin' the thing saycret—thee've put thyself into a putty tight hawl." Drusilla brought out the words with full value to every syllable. "Thee've ben *compoundin' a felony*—nayther more nor less!"

"Who put they words in thy mouth?" demanded the pedlar; the eager fierceness of his tones and the alarmed excitement in his eyes, evidencing how deeply the words had disquieted him.

"And the punishment for that, for *compoundin' a felony*, so he towld me: es fine an' imprisonment—nayther more nor less!"

The pedlar broke out into a torrent of startling profanity: the brutal vehemence of his passion making Malva shudder and turn white.

"So *now* thee know where thee do stand," rejoined Drusilla; the assured confidence of her bearing, as well as of her tones, exasperating him to an extent that almost maddened him. "Oppen thy ugly little mouth, you black-hearted varmunt, to say a single word agen father, or any of us: and off to Penzaance I'll go an' make a clean breast of it," she added, returning now to her old, natural manner. "And then (me sly owld fox, as thee thought theeself) then *thee'll* come in for thy share o' the mischief. *Compoundin' a felony*, thee ben guilty of; and fine an' imprisonment es what thee'll git for it," Drusilla repeated, flinging the words at him tauntingly. "Fine an' imprisonment, thou little booba! an' all for ten pounds!"

"Ef thee hadn' burned that bill o' sale . . ."

"Like to have the ashes of it?"

"Ef I onnly got a hint of this afore, me fine beauty!"

"Come! wan more ef! Ef thee warn't a little booba, say . . ."

The pedlar burst out into such a violent rush of oaths that even Drusilla was appalled and was almost stunned into silence.

"Never mind! never mind!" screeched the pedlar, somewhat recovering himself. "I warn't the onnly man that see'd it: though I meant to ha' kept that quiet. There was an-awther man, a gen'leman, see'd thy faather as well as meself. He was up 'pon the cleffs weth his spyglass, geekin' out at thy faather: an' I borrowed his glass from un just to tell un what it mayned. *He* got to be reckoned weth . . ."

"By *thee* as much as by *we*! Dont'ee lose sight o' that, there's a dear!" cried Drusilla tauntingly. "Whatever do happen to *we*, *thee*'rt in the swem, too! What ef it *es* onnly fine an' imprisonment: ayven a little thing like that *es* enough to make a man uncomfortable. And wance in jail, *thee*'ll often be in, knawin'ee as folks do. Wance the p'leece got a hand on thy shoulder, owld fox, they waan't be in no hurry to take it off!" she added viciously.

Every word, as she guessed (and to a greater extent than she had any idea of) told on the pedlar's fears to an almost maddening degree. Let him once get under the ban, and in the hands of the police, and he would collapse like a pricked bubble, as far as his character was concerned. One week in jail would be enough to ruin him completely. Of this he was fully aware; no one knew it better than himself. And in his fury at being thus trapped by a couple of women, the pedlar felt that if he could only have got Drusilla's windpipe between his fingers he would have squeezed the life out of her with as little compunction as if she were a hen!

Shaking his fist at her menacingly, he hobbled swiftly to the door, and was out of the cottage and lost in the starless blackness of the night, almost before they fully realised that they had actually got rid of him.

And at that moment, in the sudden silence, as Drusilla was locking and bolting the door, they could hear the voice of Morvenna singing softly to her father:—

"*Abide with me, fast falls the eventide:
The darkness deepens: Lord, with me abide!
When other helpers fail, and comforts flee,
Help of the helpless, Oh, abide with me!*"

"Ay," remarked Malva, who was now weeping openly, "the dear cheeld may well say a prayer for her poor faather: he's friendless enough, poor, dear saul, as it es!"

Suddenly they heard Morvenna give a wild, startled cry; which was followed by a medley of noises that made their blood run cold.

Malva was on her feet in an instant, and so was Drusilla: both running across the kitchen and up the narrow stairs almost as if their lives depended on their haste.

But before they could reach the landing Morvenna had rushed out to them, crying down sobbingly to them in her affright, "Quick! quick! father has a fit, or something! Oh! I'm afraid he's dying—whatever shall we do!"

With that morbid acuteness of hearing characteristic of his condition, Ezekiel—in spite of the singing, for which he had divined the reason—had overheard enough of the conversation in the kitchen to understand its drift, to which he already had the clue. And he had lived through the emotional strain of the scene there, almost as harassingly as the women themselves.

But the outlets of speech and of gesture, in *his* case, had been denied to him: and his agitation had heightened, in consequence, to the pitch of veritable torture.

Hence the "fit"—as the women vaguely characterised it—was really one of those violent, convulsive explosions by which the nervous system, in cases of such undue strain on it, struggles to adjust the balance and to avert effects more disastrous.

And Ezekiel, when the explosion presently had spent itself, sank at last, through sheer exhaustion, into a heavy, troubled sleep, as grateful to the watchers as it was vitally necessary to himself.

CHAPTER XXXV

AT THE END OF THE DAY

ON the morrow, as he felt his strength flowing back slowly, Ezekiel proclaimed his intention of returning to the cove.

He wanted to be at home in his own cottage, among the familiar things of memory: where he could see and hear the waves, could watch the gulls and smell the seaweed, and, merely by looking abroad and quietly listening, could resume the personality that here he seemed divorced from.

A skyline of rugged hilltops in the one direction, and in the other of thorn-bushes, brambles, and clumps of trees, seemed to fret him in a vague, harassing way: and the green stretch of bottoms with its wealth of berries, and even its abundant and novel bird-life, had little interest in the eyes of the grey old crabber; no longer anxious for new and unusual impressions, and to whom the sea, with its ever-changeful movement and intonation, was the one thing familiar enough to be absolutely restful to him.

It was the first time in his life, and he was now close on sixty, that he had slept, even for a single night, away from the sea: and he protested that, up here, he should never feel at home; and that, till he felt at home, he could never get back his strength—a deprivation that he rebelled against almost as unreasonably as a child.

That the cottage interior was for him a veritable torture-chamber—filled as it was, in every direction, with reminders of his sin—Ezekiel, for many reasons, did not care to hint. But this Malva had instinctively divined from the first. And it was for this reason that she was so anxious to get him down to the cove.

It took him hours, however—all the morning, in fact—to recover from the prostration that had followed his attack of the previous night. And even when he was again, to a

certain extent, himself—once more able to control the organs of locomotion and to enunciate with reasonable clearness and accuracy—he was still so weak and tired, and so full of pain, that he was as empty of energy as a half-drowned earth-worm, and scarcely cared even to open his lips.

From time to time, however, he kept questioning Malva and Drusilla for full particulars of the pedlar's visit: his half-knowledge of the interview by no means satisfying him.

Finally, in order to quiet him somewhat, they gave him an account of the scene as reasonably complete as they thought it would be wise for him to hear just at present. But they did not like to explain to him, while he was so weak, that Morvenna had confided to the schoolmaster all she knew about the money; and they were even more afraid of mentioning (however vaguely) the pedlar's parting revelation, with the new terrors it had unleashed.

As a consequence, they were considerably hampered, and became not a little muddled, in their rambling and stumbling account of the interview. And their report of it left definitely on Ezekiel's mind the impression that the pedlar's attitude was as menacing as ever. The check upon Tom's malice, at which they had hinted vaguely, entirely failing to find a lodgment in Ezekiel's memory: as, owing to their confused manner, he had not the faintest idea that the hint was in any way based upon fact.

The result was, that the recent developments of the situation were so carefully concealed from him—of course, with the best of motives—that he was left completely at the mercy of any events that might spring out of them: as Malva and Drusilla one day were to discover to their cost.

They had an early dinner, but Ezekiel could only eat a few mouthfuls; craving, however, for tea, of which he drank copiously.

After dinner, Drusilla suggested to her mother that Morvenna should go round to the miller's house and should ask him if he would drive Ezekiel down to the cove: explaining, as far as was necessary, why the request was made. If the miller were willing to do so—which Drusilla scarcely

doubted—Morvenna was to return at once, without waiting for him to accompany her, that Drusilla might set off for the cove without delay: as she wanted to have the fire lighted, and everything comfortable, by the time her father and the miller should arrive at the cottage.

So Morvenna put on her hat and hurried off to the miller; and, in less than half-an-hour, returned with the news that the trap in a few minutes would be at the door: the miller being only too glad (so he had told her) to take them for a drive on such a beautiful afternoon.

Drusilla left the cottage almost immediately: being anxious (as she had only her week-day clothes) to get down to the cove before the miller could overtake her.

When the miller arrived at the cottage he was therefore keenly disappointed at finding that the one person whose presence he was desirous of was already nearly half-way down to Polurrian, and possibly might not be met with this side of the cove.

Seeing how frettedly anxious he was to overtake Drusilla and offer her a seat, the considerate slowness with which he drove them home was as creditable to his self-control as it was to his neighbourly kindness. Indeed, his friendly behaviour throughout presently set Malva wondering whether there might not be "something"—some latent hint of sentiment, perhaps—still lingering between and linking Drusilla and himself. Possibly (thought Malva, in a fleeting moment of reverie) it was some remembrance of those old days when they were young folks sweethearting and were dreaming that by this time they would be happily man and wife. But thoughts of this kind, of course, were as elusive as sand-launces¹: and Malva let them slip from her with complete unconcern.

They were driving slowly down the lane that led from the turnpike to the cove, when they caught sight of the school-master sauntering leisurely between the hedgerows: his

¹ An eel-like fish, whose wriggling agility makes it most difficult to capture.

hands clasped behind his back and his pipe, as usual, in his mouth.

Immediately Morvenna perceived him, her face seemed to brighten and to flush with new life: a suppressed restlessness at the same time fluttering through her system.

As the trap approached him noisily over the rough cart-way, the schoolmaster turned round sharply to reconnoitre; and was considerably surprised at seeing his little sweetheart staring down at him from her seat beside the miller.

"Wait a minute, please!" cried Morvenna to the miller: colouring prettily in her girlish embarrassment: "I'm sure Mr. Richards will want to know about father."

So the miller stopped the horse, and Morvenna, turning to her mother, explained that the schoolmaster was just in front of them.

"Well, me dear, git down an' walk on weth un," said Malva. "Thee'll be down to cove, then, 'most as soon as we shall."

"Very well, mother, I will if you don't mind." And Morvenna turned to the schoolmaster, now not a couple of yards distant from the trap, and beckoned to him to come and assist her to get down.

The schoolmaster was only too pleased to have the opportunity of thus holding her in his arms, even for the brief interval while he was lifting her from the trap. And the miller, watching the tell-tale delight in their faces, felt a sharp pang of envy at their evident happiness. At the same time, however, he recognised, very clearly, that the happiness that might have been his he had himself thrown away: no one had snatched it from him, or even tricked him out of it. "I was a fool not to have got her while I had the chance!" the miller discontentedly muttered to himself. And therewith he fell to contrasting Morvenna with Drusilla, and decided promptly that Drusilla was in every way preferable to this slip of a girl, young and fresh though she was.

To old folks, who have lived through and almost forgotten such experiences, this engrossment of the unmarried in the

things and thoughts of pairing-time, occasionally seems little less than appalling. They almost fancy that even when the trump of doom is sounding there will be lovers so absorbed in making up quarrels and kissing, in planning and dreaming of marriage and all the delights consequent on it, that they will scarcely hear the summons though it wakens the very dead beneath their feet. To Malva, sitting here with her ailing husband at her side, a thought not unlike this, though entirely without bitterness, flashed momentarily (even if vaguely) through her mind: and she realised how heartily glad she would be (for their own sakes quite as much as for her own) when this unrest of pairing-time was over for both her daughters; and, with the fever out of their systems, they would be a comfort to her at last.

For the present, however, the problem of the present had to be faced: and certainly for lovers, usually so selfish, the schoolmaster and Morvenna appeared to be reasonably sympathetic.

In Ezekiel's collapse, with its train of consequences, the schoolmaster showed the keenest and most friendly interest: and the expression of his regret, though restrained in utterance, had in it the unmistakable ring of sincerity. Unaware that the schoolmaster knew of his sin, Ezekiel was surprised (in fact, almost to weakness) at the sympathetic friendliness of the schoolmaster's attitude: the deep human note, so distinctly sounded in Paul's utterance, being evidently the outcome of a very genuine sympathy.

Accordingly, when the trap presently drove on again (leaving Morvenna and the schoolmaster waving their hands in the middle of the roadway), Ezekiel remarked that Morvenna had got hold of as good a man as she would have been likely to find in half-a-dozen parishes, and he only hoped, for his part, that she would have sense enough to keep him.

"I hope so, too, I'm sure; an' I think she will," said Malva: "they do sim as fond of wan anawther as a couple o' guinea-pigs."

Meanwhile, in the little cottage in Fisherman's Row,

Drusilla was as busy as she could very well be. She had hurried down to the cove as rapidly as she could, and had been beset on all hands by questions and condolences as soon as she had showed her face within sight of the row. Even now, while she was "putting things straight" in the kitchen—the fire, the while, blazing away cheerfully under the kettle—a couple of the neighbours were hanging around her; under the pretence of assisting her, it is true, but really in order to gossip, which they were doing to their heart's content.

When the trap drove up with Ezekiel and Malva, practically all in the row were there to welcome them: and the old couple, knowing what the illness was due to, felt as troubled and confused at the unexpected greeting as if Ezekiel were just coming home from prison; and they could scarcely summon up courage enough to look their acquaintances in the face.

"Ef they knawed all about me," thought Ezekiel drearily, "they'd stone me out o' the cove, instead o' shakin' hands weth me. Hope I shall be dead before they git to knaw it. Onnly wish I was dead now," he mused, holding to life nervelessly, and desiring above all things the advent of the Merciful One—in whose arms we shall all of us fall asleep at last. Desiring its coming *not* with the impatience of youth, whose appetite, as it chances to be obstructed or satisfied, now makes, and presently will cancel, the ephemeral desire: but longing for it with the sad and weary longing of old age—the longing of one who sees the battle going against him in all directions, and is profoundly thankful for the promise of rest and the long oblivion of its sleep.

CHAPTER XXXVI

AN ELECTRIC ATMOSPHERE

THE miller, being asked by Malva if he would have a cup of tea with them, was only too pleased to accept the invitation; more especially as it was arranged that, when he drove back, Drusilla (nothing loth) should accompany him in the trap.

The schoolmaster had left Morvenna at the little foot-bridge, and the girl accordingly came indoors with her cheeks full of colour and the happiness of April shining in her eyes. The schoolmaster and herself had been planning their future together—treating their marriage next spring as almost a certainty—and her brain was now brimful of the most delicious imaginings, her pulse the while leaping and dancing in response. It was impossible not to notice the joyousness of her bearing: the delight, half shy, half significantly arch. If the kisses on her lips and cheeks, and the passionate thoughts born of them, were guessed at by her parents (she said to herself, blushing), well, they no doubt had gone through the same experiences when they were courting, and, should they question her eyes for hers, she was sure they would understand. In any case, she had little more than six months to wait, and then she would be a wife with all the doors of life open to her, and the significant smiles of others she would be able to answer smile for smile. And with thoughts like these dancing delightedly before her, Morvenna took off her hat and seated herself at the tea-table, undoubtedly in every way the happiest of the group.

As they drove back to Choone through the waning sunset, Drusilla and the miller drifted somewhat gradually (but without any squeamish pretence of reluctance) into a conversation that on both sides was frankly confidential: confidential to a degree that had only been rendered possible by the exceptional events of the last few days, and by the equally exceptional closeness of their relations in consequence.

The miller suggested to Drusilla that, as Joe had deserted her, she should come to live with him after waiting for a decent interval; say, for five or six months, or less, if she were willing. He would marry her if they could get any one to perform the ceremony, but he was afraid that this would be impossible until several years had elapsed; and he saw no reason why they should lose six or seven years merely to please the chattering gossip of the parish—which would be just as active, for that matter, seven years hence, as it would be to-day, and with quite as much reason. When they were living together, if Joe heard of it (and they would try to let him know somehow) he could get a divorce easily, and that would make a free woman of her; and then they would be married at once and everything would be all right.

Drusilla admitted, with perfect frankness (what was the use of pretending now?) that she was quite as willing to live with him, married or unmarried, as he could possibly be to have her—so fully did she trust him. But one thing—and one thing only—prevented her. Seeing how full of trouble her father's life was, she was determined never to add another straw's weight to his burdens. While he was alive, she would keep single, unless Joe should happen to die: in which case, they would be married and nothing more need be said. If her father were dead to-morrow, and the miller were still of the same mind, she would share the latter's house willingly, without a shadow of reluctance. The folks might chatter as much as they liked, it would be a matter of indifference to her: she would please herself and him, and let the world whistle.

The miller tried hard to induce her to alter her mind. But coming so recently from the stricken little household in the cove, and having Ezekiel's shaken figure still present to his thoughts, he felt the reasonableness of her decision under the circumstances, and had not the heart to press his advantage as he would have done had matters been otherwise.

In the end, it was clearly understood between them, that, on the death of Ezekiel, whenever that might happen, Drusilla and the miller would live together as man and wife.

But if Joe should die first—as she heartily hoped he would—she pledged herself here to the miller this evening (and that in true sweetheart fashion, her lips clinging to his passionately) that she would be ready to marry him at an hour's notice, if she were only a widow for half a day !

And with this pledge the miller had perforce to be content.

The next morning, however, the unexpected happened. Or, rather (to be strictly accurate), it had probably happened hours before that drive in the trap when they were pledging themselves so frankly and so passionately to each other ; though it was only the next morning that the revelation came to them.

About the middle of the morning, when the work at the mill was somewhat slack, and the miller was standing at the door whistling to himself thoughtfully, a messenger-boy came from the post-office in Newlyn with a telegram whose contents startled the miller not a little.

A body—described briefly, but quite clearly enough for the miller to feel sure it was Joe Rosevear—had been found, late on Sunday evening, in one of the Liverpool docks : and so far, apparently, there was no clue to its identity except a couple of bill-heads and a torn delivery note bearing the miller's name and address, with the addition of some indecipherable notes and figures in pencil. Mr. Pengelly was asked if he could come to Liverpool at once, in order to see if he could identify the body, as it was believed to be a case of robbery and murder. All his expenses would be paid, and he would be indemnified for loss of time : and the telegram was "reply paid," that he might answer without delay.

The miller immediately sat down and wrote out a reply to the effect that he believed he knew the man well, and he would be in Liverpool the next day to identify him, if possible.

Slipping on his coat, he dismissed the messenger, and at once hurried off to Drusilla's cottage to show her the telegram and discuss its contents with her, and to inform her that he was starting for Liverpool by the afternoon train.

Drusilla was quite as much startled as he was : but was

equally full of hope that it would prove to be Joe's body. And in the anticipation of being free for the happiness they had promised each other, she surrendered her lips to him with a passionate freedom that made their pulses leap madly.

"Telegraph at wance—as soon as thee'rt sure!" she remarked to him hungrily. "I shall want to slaip on that telegram to-morra night, Robert!"

"I waan't forgit, Drusilla—that thee may depend on! And remember! I shall howld'ee to thy promise," he added.

"I'm willin', and more than willin' ef thee want me!" said Drusilla. "But . . . wedn'ee like the cheeld to be born fust?" she suggested.

"No: that don't matter. The folks wed talk anyway—ayven ef we waited six months. And I arn't willin' to wait a single day longer than I'm forced to."

"Nayther am I, for that matter!" replied Drusilla, answering his eyes. "But a week or two, p'raps . . ." she added, blushing hotly.

"Well, I'll give'ee from now 'till Chresmas—tha's nearly eight weeks."

"Very well: I'm content. 'Tis quite long enough for me. Ef 'tis onnly as we hope it es . . ."

"There's no doubt in me mind about it!"

"Then Chresmas it shall be!" she cried to him hungrily: her eyes glittering eagerly, her face crimsoned to the tips of the ears.

"Tha's settled, then! At Chresmas, thee'rt mine for good an' all! For I feel as sure 'tis Joe," he added emphatically, "as that this here fist es mine, an' not anawther man's!" And he banged his fist upon the table till he made the cups and saucers jump.

"Ef it esn'—what a terrible disappointment it'll be for both of us!"

"It es—I feel sure!" the miller insisted.

And with that, they parted on their new footing—so novel as almost to be intoxicating—the new footing of lovers who were soon to be man and wife.

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE DEFEAT OF THE OLD

YES, it was Joe, right enough : there was no doubt about that.

One glance at the dead body was sufficient to decide the miller, and his evidence as to identity was accepted unhesitatingly.

That Joe lay here dead, was as certain as anything could be. But how he came by his death was quite another matter. The police decided that it was evidently a case of foul play : an ugly gash on the head, and the rifled pockets, leading them to the conclusion almost irresistibly. But beyond this point they were unable to get. They obtained a verdict of "wilful murder" against "some person or persons unknown:" and there the matter ended, as far as the public was concerned.

As soon as he had assured himself of the identity of the body, the miller hastened to telegraph the fact to Drusilla : and in the little cottage in Choone on that Tuesday evening there was the strange spectacle of a woman reading the news of her husband's murder with her heart leaping in her bosom with a fierce and riotous gladness, even while the child of the murdered man was stirring blindly within her.

Taking off her wedding ring Drusilla flung it on the floor and stamped on it again and again with passionate energy. Finally she fetched the hammer and battered the ring out of shape with this, and then tossed it into the fire and let it lie there and scorch.

"I'm free for ever from that and from he!" she cried fiercely. "But the cheeld es me awn anyway : an' when it do come it'll bring its love. And I shaan't begrudge un a drop of it," she added to herself wistfully, "any more than I shall begrudge un the milk in me breasts."

The murder of the intending Cornish emigrant, remained one of the unsolved mysteries of the Liverpool docks. Later

in the week, when the miller returned to Choone, he brought with him the fact of the death clearly established and his pockets full of papers giving the particulars of the inquest: but he was unable to throw the faintest gleam of light on the tragedy: and a mystery—except to the murderers—it remains to this day.

Malva was startled, as if by a thunderclap, when she heard of the murder. But the surprise caused by this was much less keen than was her agitation when Drusilla presently informed her that in less than eight weeks she and the miller were to be married.

“Don’t’ee think of it, me cheeld!” Malva earnestly implored her, seating herself heavily on the side of the bed. Drusilla had whispered to her mother to come upstairs for a talk, being anxious not to disturb her father—who was sitting motionless in the settle near the fire; if not dozing, at least resting with his eyes closed wearily—and Malva had at once assented, as she now assented almost to everything. She had followed her daughter with her heart full of shapeless forebodings, taking it for granted that the talk could be only about troubles, but the news she was actually to hear she had not guessed at even dimly. “Don’t’ee think of it, me cheeld!” she entreated Drusilla, helplessly.

“We’ve made up our minds—and we mayne to do it!” replied Drusilla, doggedly.

“Aw, dear! whatever will the neighbours say?” cried Malva: for whom the vague social conscience was practically as a god.

But Drusilla recognised in her passions, and the network of forces that produced them, a god more intimately potent for herself. And if sacrifices were to be made, she was determined to make it to this. “We’ve made up our minds: and we mayne to do it,” she repeated stubbornly.

“There’ll be a bra’ lot o’ talk about it in the parr-rish. They’ll be sure to be sayin’, why cudn’ee wait ’till after the cheeld was born?”

“Iss, I knaw: but that don’t matter to me a pin. The miller do want *me*; and I do want *he*: and we caan’t see

that waitin' will do ayther of us any good. Ef I waited 'till the cheeld do come, they'd talk just as much then. They're bound to talk, in any case, simmin' to me. An' why shud I study *they*? They've never studied *me* a dinyun.¹ Do'ee think I dedn' know when they was laughin' at me about Joe? A fat lot o' good their sympathy wed do me, ef I tried to live for the next twelve months on the taste of it! I'm bound to marr-ry agen, in any case," she added: "and the sooner the better, so far as I can see."

"I don't know that thee'rt bound . . ."

"Thee arn't six-an'-twenty, mother! I know it plain enough—whenever I do meet the miller. An' *thee* wed know it plain enough, too—ef thee wert six-an'-twenty."

"Well . . . but that don't alter the matter. Awther wemmin have had to wait more'n six months . . ."

"Onnly because they cudn' help it!" retorted Drusilla decisively.

"Then thee'rt settled on doin' it?"

"Iss! I'm as much settled on it as I am on goin' to bed to-night!"

"Well, ef thee wust, s'pose thee wust—an' there's a' end of it. It waan't do thy poor faather much good when he do hear of it, though."

"Tha's the wan thing that do worry me about the matter," rejoined Drusilla. "Everything else do run off the reel wethout a kink. But I caan't see that I can do better than take me chance, an' risk it. Ef I tried to live for six months just as I am—wethout a penny in the world to bless meself: onnly the clothes I stand up in: the cheeld comin' presently: and the rent, and me mayte an' drink, and everything else, unprovided for—what good on earth wed it do to father, or to anywan else? I might sell the furniture, or I might try to git parr-rish relief, or I might ask father to support me—but how es 'a goin' to do it? His hands will be full enough of expenses, as it es: an' how he can do more, I caan't see for the life o' me."

¹ A little bit, in the least.

"Iss, tha's true," sighed Malva dejectedly.

"After we're marr-ried, I shall be able to help'ee a bit. An' I mayne to do it, too!" said Drusilla emphatically. "Not that Robert will make any objection, I know. I feel sure he got too good a heart to begrudge'ee."

"We shall see," remarked Malva: who, in the face of the incessant crumbling that seemed to be in progress in her life, no longer had energy enough even to hope. Presently she remarked wearily, "Morvenna ben tellin' me, too, that she an' Mester Richards do want to git marr-ried by Easter."

"Don't blame her a bit!" responded Drusilla promptly. "Onnly wish I'd had the chance when I was as young as she es! I shud 'most have jumped out o' me skin weth delight!"

"Sim to me," quoth Malva querulously, "everything an' everywan es changing, or wantin' to change, now-a-days. Soon we owld wans will be like stones covered by the tide: everything goin' on ovver us, an' we forgot by everywan."

"Well . . . s'pose it got to be: come to that," replied Drusilla, taking refuge in the final idea of destiny. "I shall be owld, too, wan day, s'pose, ef I do live long enough: an' the young wans 'll be pushin' me aside, just the same. Who knows, p'raps the very cheeld I'm carr-ryin' now," she added, a sudden depression falling on her thoughts, "may give me the wuss heartache I shall ever have in me life. But, ef so—how can I help it? I don't see that I can, nohow. What es to be, will be: whether wan es young or owld. Sometimes I do think, mother," she remarked, still musingly, "that we wemmin have got the wust of it in life in every way. Cheeld-beerin', cheeld-reerin', an' pushed aside at last—things don't seem to be settled feer for us: do they, now, mother?"

"Ah, me cheeld, thee'rt gettin' a touch of it!" sighed Malva. "'T'es all'ys the way, b'leeve, so fur as I can see. Weth the children the trouble do come—much as we do long for them. They're the beginnin' an' the end, for we wemmin, sim to me." And with that she rose up and went on with some dusting.

"Goin' to lev' Morvenna be marr-ried at Easter?" Drusilla asked, after an interval of silence.

"Iss, s'pose : she do want us so badly to agree to it. And weth her faather in the way he es, p'raps it'll be best for all of us. It esn' weth we poor folks as it es weth the rich," added Malva, who to-day seemed unusually despondent; "we got to lev' our cheldern go from us 'most so soon as their bones es set. Not because we don't want them, or ha'n't got no love for them, but because we caan't feed them—caan't ayven give them bread!" And Drusilla, watching her furtively, as she pretended to dust the looking-glass, felt certain that her mother was weeping silently to herself.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

A CONSCIENCE AND ITS KEEPER

EZEKIEL'S grip on life relaxed noticeably this winter: he seemed to lose interest in everything, and wasted away to skin and bone.

All day long the immense field of the sky was covered with drifting veils of cloud, and all day long the field of the sea (almost as immense when viewed from Polurrian) was covered with the "white horses" careering in from the Atlantic. The clamorous roar of the wind across the world, the growling rumble in the chimney, the whining and whistling at every crevice, and the deep, hollow booming of the breakers on the beach, the sound of these filled the cottage from daybreak to daybreak again; until at times it almost seemed to Ezekiel—so loose and tangled was the web of consciousness owing to his weakness—that his own turbulent thoughts were finding utterance in this way, while the mere cloddish body simply listened to the strife.

Idle as he had never been idle before, except for the well-earned rest of the Sabbath, or during a spell of unusually tempestuous weather: and prostrate with an illness whose

strange manifestations seemed to his uneducated mind, with its narrow experiences, to be more like the "devil-possession" mentioned in the Scriptures than anything he had ever heard of as happening to a man: he appeared to lose heart to an astonishing degree — making no effort to hold his own in anything, but slipping, ever slipping unprotestingly into the gulf.

At times he was like the empty structure of a man from which some malignant power had stolen the informing spirit, or in which it had as hopelessly dulled the mirror of the soul. He would sit for hour after hour staring into the fire, neither stirring hand or foot or even turning his eyes. And at the best of times he would lapse into a lethargic listlessness, a stagnant, brooding silence equally pitiable.

The knowledge that he was now at the mercy of the pedlar, preyed on his mind to an extent that no one was aware of. His thoughts seemed to have made for themselves a channel of settled melancholy: and the wearying gloom of them was more than he could fight against. Up to now he had practically been the master of his life, and untrammelled (so it seemed to him) by anything or any one. But from henceforth this freedom was to be a thing of the past. In future, a whip was to be held permanently over his head, and at any moment its lash might descend on him in the sight of every one.

He had once heard Morvenna tell a droll¹ of a giant whose heart had been stolen out of his body by a conjurer,² and was ever after kept by the conjurer in his waistcoat-pocket: so that from that day the giant was at the mercy of the conjurer, who could make him hot or cold, or sad or merry, could give him torture unendurable, or pleasure as great (had he wished to) without the giant having the power to protect himself in any way. And it seemed to Ezekiel, as he sat here brooding in the twilight, that something like this had befallen himself. The pedlar had him in his power to torture as he pleased: and that, in his devilry, he would

¹ Tale.

² Witch or wizard.

exercise the power, seemed to the crabber to be as certain as that he possessed it.

And Ezekiel, facing the prospect, felt his heart grow as heavy as lead.

He fell to wondering how he could live with this horror hanging over him. Practically at any moment (so he imagined) whenever it might suit the whim or the malice of the pedlar, he might be disgraced and ruined for life, might be made an outcast among his fellows, and be thrust—he faced it shudderingly—into a veritable pit of hell.

Under the stress of this anguish that wrung his soul so bitterly, he often wondered whether his fellow-men (taken all together) would be as merciless and cruel towards him as the pedlar undoubtedly would be.

Supposing he should make a clean breast of it to the minister—should confess everything to his neighbours in the cove, or to the folks of the parish generally—supposing, in the last resort, he gave himself up to the police—would the humiliation, even then, be as bitter and enduring as the humiliation he would have to bear through his bondage to the pedlar?

He almost doubted it in his heart. But he was afraid to put it to the test.

As a matter of fact (though of this Ezekiel was ignorant) the pedlar was as much scared at the thought of moving in the matter, as Ezekiel was at the idea that move he might and would. Tom's character was so full of cracks and flaws, and the night-side of his life had to be guarded with such jealous watchfulness (not only from the eyes of any one connected with the police, but equally from the eyes of all respectable folks) that not for twice twenty pounds would he risk being taken into a police-court on a charge such as that Drusilla had hinted at. He loved torturing a fellow-creature—no one loved the game better—but he rated the safety of his own skin infinitely higher; and his first thoughts would certainly be given to that, whatever other pleasure he might lose as a consequence.

As far as Ezekiel was now concerned, Tom felt that his

tongue was tied as well as his hands. But, savage though he was at having fallen into the trap, he consoled himself with the reflection that not only had he made twelve pounds out of the transaction—as he had only given Joe eight pounds for the furniture—but he had also bowled over Ezekiel and left Drusilla without a husband; by a side-blow he had lessened the contents of the miller's pockets; and, generally, he had made all who had in any way annoyed him recognise that, in future, it would be wisest for them not to trifle with him: an exercise of power which, to one who was practically half an outcast, was as meat and drink and fine clothes and respect, all in one.

If Ezekiel had realised the new attitude of the pedlar, the knowledge would have been tonic to him, and his health might have been re-established. But with the secretive-ness of the Celt where the deeper emotions are concerned, Ezekiel refrained from any reference to the mental cause of his illness; keeping *that* aspect of it as carefully out of sight as if it were a secret cancer he was ashamed of.

And Malva, who had never been garrulously inclined—having spent her life here among the lonely hills, half the time with only the wind and the sea for company—when she presently saw that “father” was inclined to be so taciturn, thought it best to humour him and not to uncover a healing wound. Having hinted to him (and that pretty plainly, as she thought) how the pedlar stood now in relation to the matter, she had taken it for granted that he had understood the hint. But being a man—and at the best of times men were but crotchety animals—she assumed that he simply did not choose to refer to it.

And it was out of this tangle of faulty interpretation, of inadequate speech, and of knowledge equally ineffective, that the great gloomy Figure ever at Ezekiel's elbow (waiting to lay hands on him and crush him when the hour was fully ripe for it) was weaving the net in whose meshes the crabber was now entangled helplessly.

It was noticeable that the strictly religious sentiments played in Ezekiel's life at present a part strangely insignifi-

cant. It was evidently the attitude of his mere fellow-men—the conscience, the average moral standard of the community—that he was constantly considering and went in such fear of. But the old pagan survivals and hybrid superstitions that swarm, full of life, in the lower chambers of the House Beautiful—where the gods dwell, each with his altar and his ministers—*these* the crabber cowered before almost as noticeably.

At one time he would have the idea that the dead man he had robbed was standing outside the cottage in the black, stormy night: his face pressed against the window-panes while he stared wistfully into the kitchen, and the cold salt-water dripping from his garments as he craved dumbly for human companionship and the warmth and comfort of the hearth. Another time he would fancy that his son drowned long ago—and who had never been laid to rest in consecrated ground—was standing outside arm-in-arm with the stranger: the pair of dripping figures, with their loose flapping garments and their white bony skeletons, rapping for admittance all night long. And then, again, he would quake and shiver with secret terror at the idea (at times amounting to a definite hallucination) that the dead man actually stood at his elbow: stood there grey and shadowy, and as silent as the grave, but always with his filmy eyes watching him intently, and with his wasted hand held out palm upward, as if dumbly inviting him to place something in its grasp.

Or, perhaps, his mood would shift to one subtly self-defensive, and he would fall to musing of the secret and hidden things of life; of the concealed trespasses of wives, of husbands, of young girls: of murders committed so privately that they were never discovered; of suicides, buried at night at the windy cross-roads, tugging hard at the stake that nailed them to the coffin, that they might get abroad again to reveal some secret they had concealed harmfully; and of families, now prosperous and respected by every one, that were flourishing on the evil gatherings of wreckers—on the ill-gotten gains of men infinitely worse than he was, and who yet, in

spite of all (as he now reminded himself) had died in their beds at last as peacefully as if they were saints.

The chaos of his thoughts was so exhausting in its perplexity, that Ezekiel became at last like a man half-demented; falling away, now and then, into strange fits and paroxysms which left him eaten up with weakness and physically a mere wreck.

It was a whisht¹ case, every one decided sympathetically. And as they discussed it around the hearthsides in the cove this winter, more than one decided that the harmless old man—for they had already begun to consider him as uncannily aged beyond his years—must either be suffering from some mysterious “judgment” (for which no one could see a reason, so inoffensive as he was) or else, and more probably, had been fatally “ill-wished” and would pine away helplessly till he was laid beneath the turf.

CHAPTER XXXIX

THE TRIUMPH OF THE YOUNG

WHEN Malva mentioned to her husband that Morvenna and the schoolmaster wanted to be married in the spring (the girl, apparently, having set her heart on it) Ezekiel roused himself sufficiently to pause and hesitate and object, and that to an extent quite unusual with him of late.

“Why, she’ll be havin’ cheldern ’fore she esn much more than a cheeld herself!” he remarked, shaking his head dissentingly. “Give her time to grow up.”

But this side of the matter had been present to Malva from the first, and she took “the cheeld’s” part here and indeed all along the line. She recognised clearly the nubile unrest with which Morvenna was now tingling, and she thought it wisest (for many reasons) to let the girl reach her

¹ Sad or melancholy.

goal while her heart was thus set on it. She accordingly "talked father over," as she had promised Morvenna she would do—and that with a mixture of shrewdness and worldly-wisdom which few would have given her credit for—and finally succeeded in obtaining his consent.

Although Morvenna had been secretly building on the hope ever since the schoolmaster had first suggested it to her, she was full of delight at the knowledge that *at last* she was sure of her happiness, and might even count the days to it, if she wished to do so. And count the days she did, before she went to bed that night.

Her mother thought it was merely a "sum" the girl was engaged on so intently: but even a mother (however sympathetic she may be) at times fails to see *everything* that goes on in a girl's heart. And Morvenna's heart was at present taking soundings in the sea of life for a voyage which promised to be so novel and delightful to her that merely to sit here and dream of it was a happiness in itself.

Malva had broken the news of Joe's death to Ezekiel in as guarded a way as her care for him could suggest. Concealing from him the fact that the carter had been murdered, she merely told him that Joe's body had been found in one of the Liverpool docks, leading him to infer that it was a case of accidental drowning: at which the old crabber shook his white head dejectedly; seeing here, again, in his morbid imagination, another attempt of the Sea to avenge herself on him until he should be literally humbled into the dust.

As soon as he realised, however, that Drusilla was a widow, Ezekiel suggested that she had better "sell up" and come home again. "I don't like her livin' up there by herself: lev' her come home weth we," he remarked to his wife.

But Malva so managed (in view of the actual state of matters) that Ezekiel not only did not press his suggestion, but, instead, found himself presently assenting to the hint that they should again let Drusilla have a dip into the tea-caddy in order that she might go on without getting into debt.

After the first few days, during which it appeared to have fretted him considerably, Ezekiel seemed to have let the matter slip out of his thoughts. At any rate, he made no reference to it in any way. And when Drusilla visited the cottage (as she did from time to time) he accepted her presence, apparently, on the old matter-of-fact footing, without troubling to consider whether she were now wife or widow.

The weeks, however, that crawled along so sluggishly for Ezekiel, danced and skipped away for Drusilla with a speed that was almost startling. Presently the date fixed for her second marriage was so near that it became imperative that Ezekiel should hear of her intentions: unless she wished to keep them a secret from him until the ceremony was over. At one time, she half decided with her mother that she would let him hear of the change just when accident might reveal it: not beforehand (and deliberately) informing him of her intentions. But in the end she felt disgusted with this cowardly attitude, seeing that the act was one she was in no way ashamed of. So she bade her mother tell him openly: and that as soon as she pleased.

Malva had shirked the unpleasant duty as long as she dared; but at last she felt that she could shirk it no longer: seeing that next week Drusilla was to be married. Up to the present, no one in the parish knew of the approaching wedding, as the miller had agreed with Drusilla that they would be married by licence, and so escape the flood of gossip which would be released by "calling the banns." But next week the news would be all over the parish—as the marriage was to be "solemnised" at Choone parish church—so Malva decided that at last she must break the news to Ezekiel, and must trust to Fate to see her safely through whatever might ensue.

To her immense relief, and almost equally to her surprise, Ezekiel received the news in the most matter-of-fact way. "Well, better a wife than a widda, s'pose," said he: "wan cud see plain enough Drusilla warn't cut out for a widda:" and with that, as far as he was concerned, he let the matter drop.

In reality, he was so confounded by the demoralisation of his life—so bewildered by the ruin that now fronted him in every direction—that he no longer had the energy to fight against anything. Should they come to his bedside one night and tell him the house was burning over him, it seemed as likely as not that he would close his eyes passively and (accepting it as “fate,” and the fulfilment of the “judgment” on him) would merely say helplessly, “Well, let me die!”

Few things are sadder than distressful old age. Crippled by the combined pressure of ignorance and poverty, stripped ruthlessly of the familiar happiness it has been gathering for a lifetime, and with even the cloak of its self-respect forlornly in tatters—the while the sands of its hope and the daylight of its opportunities are narrowing and lessening at every ticking of the clock—how should it be other than depressed and very sad? Especially as, to heighten the effect of its ruin, all the time there goes on gaily around it the triumphal procession of the young to take possession of their heritage. A procession of bright young eyes and healthy young cheeks, with their sun not yet mounted to its meridian and their year scarcely more than at the fresh green of April. But a procession also that behind its flags, its banners, and its blare of brasses, has keen cruel weapons that can cut and stab effectively: a procession that will not hesitate to press its claims ruthlessly, should a fragment of its heritage be even momentarily denied to it.

And on Malva Trevaskis and her sorely-stricken husband, thrust aside at every juncture to let the younger ones pass, the weight of their doom had now fallen so heavily, that to bear up against it was more than they could manage: they could merely hang their hands helplessly and wait upon Fate.

Drusilla's second marriage, as far as the mere ceremony went, was commonplace and quiet even to the point of tameness. Malva and Morvenna were present as they had been at the first wedding—driving to and from the church with Drusilla and the miller—but this time Malva “gave

away" the bride (though fully aware how farcical was her part in the transaction), Morvenna, as before, merely "witnessing" the gift. No one else attended by direct invitation, and there was no wedding-supper and no merrymaking of any kind.

None the less, Drusilla and the burly miller seemed intoxicated with the passionate delight of their new relation. The fierce glow of their exultation showing itself so plainly that it made Morvenna feel uncomfortably eager and restless; and at the same time set Malva contrasting Drusilla's present attitude with that when she had been given as a bride to Joe Rosevear.

"She've got the right man at laast, an' not a day too soon," the grey old mother mused to herself, as she watched Drusilla's shining eyes and her cheeks crimsoning hotly. "They do sim as delighted as ef they was a couple o' cheldern, fondlin' an' kissin' ovver a new toy. 'T'es a good job nowan stood in their way, simminly." And with that Malva fell to thinking of Morvenna and studying *her*.

The gossip springing out of Drusilla's second marriage was loud and ill-natured and sufficiently prolonged. But Drusilla and the miller simply laughed it to scorn. They had each other, and they were so happy in the mutual possession that this cackling of the women-folk, old and young together, affected them no more than the cackling of so many geese.

Happily, as far as their comfort was concerned, they lived remote from any village, or even from a cluster of houses. Choone village was a couple of miles from the mill, the hamlet in Polurrian cove was more than three miles away, and the dwellings that were absolutely the closest neighbours to the mill were the cottages in Choone bottoms, distant nearly half a mile. Drusilla and the miller therefore could be a law to themselves—or could let their passion be a law to them, which amounted to much the same thing—without having the gossips buzzing around them like flies, and, like flies, dropping into their honey and spoiling it.

Morvenna at present visited the mill but seldom. In her

heart, she had never approved of her sister's hasty second marriage; and to her fancy there seemed always to be about the mill, and about the attitude of Drusilla and the miller to each other, an atmosphere of guilty passion that she frankly did not relish. She felt disquieted and uncomfortable whenever she was with them: her thoughts unhealthily active, and her blood full of feverish heat. So, in order to escape the mental and physical disturbance—which had much the same effect on her as if she had come in contact with something unclean—Morvenna went to the mill as rarely as possible, and made her visit as short as possible when she was there.

But Malva suffered from no such refinement of sentiment. Drusilla and the miller were man and wife, and married without scandal, and Malva, as far as her strength would admit, visited the mill as often as she could: more especially in view of Drusilla's condition, which she decided required now the watchful eye of a mother: Drusilla assenting obediently, as she would have assented almost to anything, so happy was she now in every possible way.

CHAPTER XL

HOPES AND REALISATIONS

TOWARDS the end of February the heavy, trampling rains and the blustering winds that had been beating and buffeting the peninsula for months, seemed to have spent their force, at least for the present; and the huge hump of granite, thrust out so boldly into the stormy waters of the Atlantic, once more began to wear a habitable appearance.

The skylarks sang blithely high above Polurrian, the chaffinches chirped familiarly from the furze-bushes and the budding hedgerows, and the daffodils, the jonquils and the tiny clusters of violets flowered profusely along the margin of the brawling little stream.

With the reviving world, Ezekiel seemed to revive also. His four months' rest in the sheltered chimney-corner had brought back much of his physical strength, and at the same time had steadied, quite as notably, his grip on the subtler machinery of his life—a grip which, at the end of the year just past, had evidently been relaxed almost to the vanishing-point.

But he was still far from being the man he was before his collapse, as he was sufficiently aware in only too many ways—some of them so obscure as to be known chiefly to himself; but others noticeable enough even to the most casual observer.

Still, the surface improvement was decidedly encouraging, and Malva and Morvenna rejoiced at it with a great lightening of the heart.

“Father is picking up nicely,” they remarked to one another. “He’ll make old bones yet—if things go on as they’re going now.”

In order to employ himself, and to feed the steadily-growing hope that he might again be able to “earn a crust of bread,” Ezekiel began presently to look out his crab-pots and to busy himself in the task of overhauling and repairing them.

At this Malva and Morvenna were greatly delighted; from a motive as purely untinged by selfishness as if the grey old crabber were merely a sick child who was again beginning to take an interest in his playthings.

“Only see how pleased he is!” they whispered to one another. “He’ll soon be all right if he goes on like this!”

Meanwhile Morvenna and the schoolmaster were as busy as they could be, completing their preparations for their entry into Paradise: which was to take place early in Good-Friday week. Easter this year fell late in April, so they had still several weeks to spend in that wonderful dreamland which happy lovers pass through leaning caressingly against each other: hearing the while a music so infinitely deep and tender (even if with a note of voluptuousness running through it), that the memory of it will presently sweeten many a day

for them when the road of life has grown commonplace and dusty, and when the fret of it (but for this) would be felt by them even to weariness.

The schoolmaster had been so fortunate as to find a pretty little dwelling, somewhat nearer to the school than the cottage he was now lodging in, and situated in what, perhaps, was the pleasantest nook in the valley. He was to take possession of the house at Ladyday, all being well, and he intended to live there (furnishing it and generally preparing it for his bride) till he could lead her across the threshold on that blissful morning which was to link her life to his with that exquisite closeness they were so eager for.

They had arranged that their wedding-night should be spent in Penzance, from which, on the following morning, they were to proceed to Plymouth, to spend a week in sight-seeing and other such enjoyments—of which the delight of their new relations would by no means be one of the least—finally returning to Polurrian on the Friday after Easter, to take up life in the valley on the blissful footing of man and wife !

Their plans were complete down to the minutest particular, and they would talk them over and over literally by the hour : finding in this planning and arranging, this anticipating and day-dreaming, a happiness as inexhaustible as that they found in the caresses with which they sweetened the talks that neither of them seemed ever willing to end.

The third of March was Morvenna's eighteenth birthday, and, on this the last birthday she would spend as a maiden, she had the schoolmaster down to tea at the little cottage in the cove : her parents and her sweetheart between them petting her so lovingly that her heart was in a perfect tumult of delight. And as she said her prayers that night in the quiet of her little bedroom, she had the feeling that surely nowhere in the whole wide world was there a girl so abundantly happy and so fortunate as herself.

About the middle of March, Drusilla climbed painfully, but joyfully withal, to yet another stage in her life as a woman. It was a stage for whose outlook she had hungered

long and often, and she rejoiced in her attainment to it with a triumphant gladness that to her old grey-haired mother seemed almost to be girlish.

"There's no more to know now!" she remarked to Malva, as she cuddled her baby hungrily between her breasts. "I'm a mother, now, the same as other marr-ried wemmin, mother!" And she laughed, for all her weakness, snuggling the baby to her warmly.

"Well, I'm glad thee'rt content, me cheeld," Malva replied soothingly. "All thee got to do now, es to git strong and rear her."

"I shall do that all right enough," Drusilla remarked smilingly. And then, from weakness and happiness, she fell quietly asleep.

Morvenna was delighted with the baby, and especially pleased that it was a girl. For the next week she was up to Drusilla's nearly every other day, and to be allowed to hold the baby was a treat she was always pleading for. The mere contact of the little one's cheeks with her own filled her body with strange stirrings—an exquisite disquiet, a warm thrilling—that seemed to penetrate deliciously to the most secret springs of life.

"I shall call her *Morvenna*, after thee," Drusilla promised her smilingly. "And next year, when thee git thy baby . . ."

Morvenna shook her head dissentingly: her cheeks crimsoning hotly.

"Iss, iss! thee'll have wan next year, right enough! I know it by thy eyes," remarked Drusilla teasingly; evidently enjoying Morvenna's embarrassment. "Mind! ef 'tes a girl, I shall expect 'ee to call her after me."

"Well, I will . . . if I have a little girl," replied Morvenna, her voice sinking down almost to a whisper.

"Well, see that it es a girl, so that thee can keep thy promise." And Drusilla lay back, smiling to herself.

Drusilla's baby slipped so often now into Morvenna's talks with the schoolmaster, that at last he asked her amusedly, "Is it such a wonderful baby, then?"

“No . . . but it's a *baby*!” answered Morvenna, blushing rosily: all the woman, and all the latent motherhood in her nature, being summed up in this, as she was sufficiently aware.

And the schoolmaster, recognising it also, let the subject drop.

CHAPTER XLI

THE RETURN OF THE SWALLOWS

THE swallows had returned, one could see them darting about everywhere; the larks sang almost from sunrise to sunset; and the cuckoos, from their secret haunts in the green depths of the valleys, sounded that delicious note of enchantment which they surely must have learned from the wise, ancient gods—so full is it of the beauty and mystery of a world as yet in its prime.

The hawthorn had begun to flower; the bees and butterflies were again abroad; on every hillside and patch of common the gorse was goldenly abundant; and the fruit-trees were blossoming everywhere, as delicately draped as if they were brides.

It was spring—it was April—it was an ideal day for a wedding. And it was Morvenna's marriage morning—the day of days in her life!

In another hour she was to be a bride—and a bride at eighteen! The girl's heart leaped with happiness—her cheeks flamed with delicious colour—she panted softly—her lips trembled—she was almost dazed with exquisite joy.

Malva and Drusilla together dressed her lovingly for the wedding, the girl trembling and thrilling restlessly as they fitted the bridal gown to her, so alive was she in every fibre and so full of ashamed delight; and then they let her hold the baby and kiss and caress it hungrily: Morvenna putting its tiny hands again and again to her parted lips, and pressing its little face to her burning cheeks passionately.

The schoolmaster had ordered a carriage from Penzance for the bride, and Ezekiel (though shaking noticeably from the unusual excitement, and with the old "catch" in his speech persistently asserting itself) kept the promise he had made to Morvenna a week or two previously and drove up to Choone with Malva and his daughters. And presently, in the quaint little granite church, in the presence of the few neighbours who had gathered to see the ceremony, he "gave away" Morvenna to the man she had chosen, and to whom she now surrendered herself with a gladness that was unmistakable.

About a couple of hours later (as she was driving away from her father's cottage with her husband's arm around her waist) Morvenna leaned from the carriage window to wave her handkerchief to her parents, and saw Ezekiel and Malva, and Drusilla holding up the baby, standing together at the end of the row to watch the carriage out of sight, half-a-dozen of the neighbours being clustered in the rear.

As she waved and fluttered her handkerchief, they caught the signal delightedly, one and all waving their hands in return; the neighbours even sending up something like a cheer. And Morvenna's eyes dimmed with tears in spite of her great happiness.

That chapter of her life—her girlhood, and all it meant for her—was at last ended for her as irrevocably as the homely life of the cottage had ended for her brothers on the day that they were drowned. And as she felt the sharp pang of this final separation, she clung to her husband with a sudden terror at the unknown and the unfamiliar; whispering to him, almost tremulously, "You will be good to me, dear, won't you? I have no one, now, but you!"

CHAPTER XLII

WATCHING AND WAITING

WHEN Morvenna and her husband returned from their honeymoon, Morvenna had steadied into the young wife reasonably well. With the wedding-ring on her finger, and the deepened knowledge in her eyes, she took her place in her new home with a blending of the girl and of the wife that was as delightful as it was winsome and irresistibly piquant. And the schoolmaster almost worshipped his shy girl-wife, with her happy eyes and her vivid blushes and her pretty coaxing ways: treating her, in fact, more like a sweetheart than a husband; as her mother and sister were aware far more clearly than herself.

Malva was thankful, with a deep, unspoken gratitude, that the girl was so profoundly happy in her new position: and Drusilla—though she saw here a love deeper than her own experiences—was in no way envious, but rejoiced at it ungrudgingly.

Morvenna made her parents come up to her house to tea, as often as she could get them there, by stratagem or otherwise. And Ezekiel more than once reiterated his gladness that he had let “the little wan” marry when she did.

“I wedn’ have spoiled such happiness as the cheeld do sim to be havin’, for a new boat fitted out complayte from stem to starn!” he assured Malva earnestly, after one of these tea-drinkings. “Why, the cheeld es as happy as the day es long, b’leeve! The queen on her throne cudn’ be no happier, I shud say.”

“God bless her, an’ she do deserve it!” replied Malva sympathetically.

“Ay . . . God bless her!” repeated Ezekiel slowly: and then fell a-musing, remembering the burden on his back.

The pedlar had been quiet, now, for nearly six months; but Ezekiel dared not hope that his enemy had forgotten

him. Every morning he got up aching with the dread that during the day the pedlar might appear; and every night when he went to bed he thought to himself drearily, "Anawther day ovver! but to-morra he may be comin'! Ef I cud onnly die off durin' the night!"

In spite of the strain that was exhausting the very tap-root of his life, Ezekiel made an effort to resume crabbing this spring, and managed, with the assistance of young Dick Laity (who gave his services gratuitously: it being for "*Morvenna's father*") to put down rather more than half of his pots. But instead of now being able, as he had been in the past, to chose the stations that the experience of a lifetime had taught him were the best, Ezekiel had to be content with choosing such positions as he could reach without subjecting himself to too great a strain. And at the same time, even in fishing for bait, he was unable to go to a distance that might prove unduly tiring, lest the wind should rise suddenly on an incoming tide, and the heavy seas—that here increase almost without warning—should make the handling of the boat more difficult than he could manage. As a consequence, he rarely went far from the shore, and at no time ventured entirely out of sight of it. The strange, prostrating attacks that had so often overtaken him, had entirely destroyed his nerve and the very marrow of his manhood: and had left him, so to speak, honeycombed with a distrust of himself that was incurable. He was now frankly afraid to find himself out of sight of land, dreading (he knew not what) mysterious visitations: and equally in fear of the ancient Sea and the implacable enmity he divined in her.

His life, from henceforth, was to be that of a haunter of the shore-line. No more was he to sail out on the long Atlantic rollers, till the stony, wind-beaten hills and the sheltered little coves should all become invisible for him, and the grey line of the sea should be everywhere his horizon. No more, sailing far beyond the wild outer skerries, find himself with only the waves and the wandering sea-birds and the homeless wind for his companions, and feel, the while, as much at home as if he were in the kitchen with his wife.

The life on the sea, as he had known it best and loved it most heartily, was over for him once for all—was ended, now, irrevocably. In future, his life must be little more active than that of a limpet: the tide feeding him, and the flavour of the salt water running through him, but the romance and mystery of the sea cut off from him for ever!

And the old crabber, in his weakness and his pathetic isolation, as he looked out towards the open water, which he was now no more to venture on, often found his heart swelling and his eyes dimming mistily: feeling that, at *his* age, to have “failed” and broken down in this way, was the sorest judgment on him that even an enemy could have devised.

All this time, the pedlar, quiet though he had kept, had by no means forgotten Ezekiel and the secret hoard in his possession. But Tom had decided that, if anything more were to be got out of the crabber, he must be cornered when he had none of his women-folk about him. Away from the defences, as well as the defenders, in his cottage, he might perhaps be found again as weakly impressible as he was on that memorable Saturday morning which the pedlar never thought of without a sense of secret relish that made him chuckle to himself and slap his thighs delightedly.

During the winter, Tom had taken his van to Penzance, where he peddled his wares among the poorer workers and the outlying householders; lying snug in his van when the weather was at its worst, and at such times nibbling carefully into his private hoard.

The haunt he had chosen for himself was in the oldest and most crowded quarter of what is known as the “old” quay: not a stone’s throw from the ancient headland to which the town owes its name.¹ The knot of courts and squares and grimy alleys—with its population almost dense enough for a human piggery—exactly suited Tom’s tastes

¹ Penzance=Pen sans: the holy headland. A tiny chapel, dedicated to St. Anthony, stood on this windy headland for centuries. A mutilated image, the sole remaining relic of the little chapel, is still preserved carefully in St. Mary’s churchyard.

and requirements: and here, during the winter, he had enjoyed himself stealthily among the tramps and cadgers and other shady characters, and had revelled in the hoggish pleasures which the neighbourhood offered so freely.

Owing to his cleverness with the fiddle, the pedlar was always considered a welcome addition to the company in any of the noisy taverns that clustered around the harbour. And night after night he sat and fiddled in one or the other of the reeking little tap-rooms, enjoying his position as a favourite among the haunters of the water-side, and enjoying even more the sense of something not unlike power, which to a certain extent grew out of his popular appreciation. The change from the bleak loneliness of his life on the moors, and his position as a kind of companionless outcast, to the warm habitable atmosphere here in the taverns, and the noisy *camaraderie* of the sailors and their parasites, was one the pedlar enjoyed thoroughly and made the most of while he had the chance.

But when the winter broke up, and the difficulty of travelling on the open roads and in the narrow country lanes was once more reduced to manageable proportions, Tom drifted out of Penzance as quietly as he had entered it.

Rejoiced to be again on the windy highway, he took his way to Choone with his van gaudily re-painted and his stock not only replenished but increased; and with his mind set doggedly on the intention to force again from Ezekiel another handful of the sovereigns he so persistently hankered after.

For many weeks Tom stealthily kept his eye on Ezekiel's life: but he found matters so unpropitious for the purpose he had in his mind, that he almost despaired of ever being able to compass it.

Practically, in the cottage Ezekiel was never left alone: either Malva or Morvenna always being with him. And as he rarely, in those days, went farther than the ridge of shingle, he was never out of sight of the eyes watching him from the cottage, and was consequently unattackable, by stratagem or otherwise.

When Ezekiel began to resume his crabbing expeditions, the pedlar hoped that, at last, his chance had arrived.

But for the first few weeks after the pots were down, Ezekiel rarely strayed a yard from a certain fixed track. He went to and from his pots, and he fished here and there for bait, keeping always within a radius of about a mile and a half from Polurrian, and, immediately he came ashore, he went straight to his cottage, without lingering on the beach even for half-an-hour.

If he wished to rest on the sea-front, as he used to do of old, Malva brought out a chair for him in front of the cottage, and here he would sit motionless often for hours: watching the sea and the distant boats, and letting the sunshine soak into him: with scarcely any other sign that it was a living man sitting there except the slow, intermittent puffing at his pipe.

The crabber's sluggish, sheltered existence exasperated Tom to an intolerable degree. How to get at him, while he was like this, was a question that puzzled Tom greatly. But get at him he would, on this he was determined.

CHAPTER XLIII

STORM

TOWARDS the middle of June, and nearly six weeks after he had resumed his crabbing, Ezekiel began to move about a little more freely.

He once even walked as far as Drusilla's—resting at Morvenna's on the way, and driving back in the miller's trap—and though this had exhausted him for the whole of the following day, he was still so pleased with the notable achievement that the new heart it put in him seemed well worth the strain.

When Morvenna had been a wife about a couple of months, she began to ail a little; as Malva was quick to discover. The girl was growing a mother at the roots of her heart, as

she was aware with a tremulous happiness that Malva clearly understood. And now her husband and her parents were always hanging around her affectionately, making as much of her as if she were a delicate bit of china which the slightest rough handling would injure irreparably.

Racking his brain for means of giving her pleasure, Ezekiel one Saturday made up his mind that he would go to Newlyn and buy for her a pretty stuffed bird that was displayed in one of the shop-windows there, and which he knew was for sale at a reasonable figure. He had more than once seen Morvenna stop to admire the bird—it was a well-preserved specimen of the golden oriole—and he felt sure that she would be delighted to have it for her own, to set up in the little parlour in which she took such pride.

He accordingly set off along the cliff-path to Newlyn (as this would shorten the route by quite a mile and a half) and on arriving at the quaint, busy little fishing-town, he found the dusty case still in the window and was able to purchase it at the price he had decided on—Drusilla having “gone shares” with him in making up the money.

Tying up the case in his red cotton handkerchief, for convenience in carrying as well as to screen it from the sun, he strolled to “the cliff,” for a few minutes’ gossip—as at this point, immediately overlooking the harbour, the fishermen congregate on a Saturday afternoon almost as thickly as bees when they are swarming.

The talk on the cliff-top to-day was almost entirely about the “revival” that had recently started in Penzance and which within the last week had extended to Newlyn: and Ezekiel listened to it with the most absorbing interest.

A wonderful young man, of strange personal magnetism, had been preaching up and down in the scattered towns of Cornwall, and lately—about ten days ago—he had reached Penzance, where his success among the townsfolk had been little short of marvellous.

Although the central and most stimulating figure of the revival had not yet preached outside the towns, men lifted to a new level by the stir and heat of the movement had

risen up around him, like sons born of him spiritually, and had been preaching in the villages in every direction. One of the most acceptable of the purely local evangelists was the Reverend Alfred Naesmith, a consumptive young Londoner, whose face and figure were familiar to all the fisher-folk of the district, as he had been living at Newlyn, for the sake of his health, for the last eighteen months. Feeling his life passing away with depressing fruitlessness, Mr. Naesmith had begun, of late, to count the sands, that now were so ruthlessly falling in the hour-glass, almost as if they were grains of gold. He had been awakened to a new sense of the value and uses of a personality by the wide fruitfulness of the evangelist who was rousing Penzance, and, under the stimulus of the latter's impressive grip and inspiration, Mr. Naesmith had recently resumed his efforts in the ministry, though only on the footing of an auxiliary local preacher.

When Ezekiel had edged his way among the gossips on the cliff-top, till he had secured a convenient resting-place against the iron railing, he had found the air not only full of echoes of the deep and widespread revival in Penzance, but full also of vivid personal reminiscences of the more recent scenes and incidents in Newlyn, where, a few days previously, a memorable height of enthusiasm had been reached under the fervent and impassioned preaching of young Mr. Naesmith.

To-morrow Mr. Naesmith was to preach at Choone, and, according to the hum and buzz of gossip, so many were arranging to go up there to hear him that the tiny granite chapel of which Choone boasted would probably not hold half the crowd. It was therefore considered likely that he would preach in the open air: and it was also rumoured that the Choone folk were preparing for such a contingency, and on that day would practically throw open their cottages and would accommodate strangers as well as acquaintances with a kind of feasten-tide hospitality. Many of the fisher-folk from Newlyn were going to take their dinners with them—as for some of these it would mean a tramp of nearly half-a-dozen miles—and others were making

arrangements to drive there in waggon, or even in the rickety fish-jowsters' carts, which for this occasion were being placed freely at their service. Altogether it seemed likely that the gathering would be a notable one, and that it would be spiritually memorable as well—seeing how the stir and excitement of anticipation were already subtly sensitising the minds of so many, and quickening them into a mood of such emotional receptivity that anything, or everything, might be possible under the circumstances.

"I'll go up to hear un to-morra, ef I'm spared," decided Ezekiel; who had recently got into the habit of talking to himself. "The saints of owld cud cast out devils, so they do say, an' p'raps, ef this es possible, he'll cast out mine; an' give me back me paice o' mind agen," he sighed, drearily. "*Iss! ef I'm spared, I'll go up an' hear un'!*—The man's 'most a saint already: he got power weth God, surely. I must hear what he got to say: he may have a word for *me*.—Iss," he muttered persistently, "I sim to feel somehow that he've got a message for me. I caan't rest 'till I do hear it—'tes playin' on me mind so!"

Meanwhile, everywhere around Ezekiel, on the swarming cliff-top, religious experiences were being narrated with a dramatic vivacity that was almost startling, or were being discussed with a feverish restlessness as contagious as an epidemic.

The air was full of stories of remarkable "convictions of sin," and of men struck down by the arrow of "the Word" while in the act of denying and even defying its power. Tales of freeing from spiritual deadness, or from the bondage of Satan, in some cases attained after hours of agonised "seeking," and in other cases gained as a runner makes a leap. Excited and fervidly emotional accounts of the transition from a sense of spiritual guiltiness to one of exquisite rejoicing in the "light and liberty" of "conversion." And strange tales of men who, from a sense of terror at God's existence, had been brought to a deep gratitude and tenderness of heart at the mere idea that they lay helpless in the hollow of His hand.

The little town was as full of echoes of these experiences as, when pilchards are on the coast, the air is populous with sea-birds and in every direction seems to be alive with their cries.

Ezekiel had followed up, with the most intense interest, more than one of the stranger cases of "conversion"—not the mere change of poise in an unripe boy, or in a hunger-smitten girl with half her nature undeveloped—but the new shifting of the helm in grown men and women: worn, iron-grey seniors who had been matured by many experiences and who had learned to trust themselves, expecting help from no one else: and the effect had been to disquiet him profoundly. He seemed to realise, with a new gravity and poignancy, that here were ageing folks like himself—fathers of families, grey-haired mothers, grandfathers and grandmothers—who could yet, in response to a profound spiritual impulse, cast the slough of their old lives irrevocably (so it seemed to him), and experience, in all its freedom, the joy of the "new birth."

He began to ache, with a deep and anguishing pang, at the thought of his own spiritual isolation; at the sin that cleaved close to him, and at the slime that nothing might wash away.

Nothing? He felt a sense almost of feverish exasperation. He *would* be cleansed! If others could be cleansed, he would be cleansed too!

And to this mood he held doggedly—it gripped him as morbidly as a "fixed idea"—voicing it to himself with almost wearying iteration.

Presently some children gathered on the cliff-top and began to play at "revivals" in imitation of their elders. A little boy of eight stood up as the preacher, his tiny sister kneeling before him with her face in her hands, while the other children, standing around them in a circle, sang fragments of hymns at the top of their little voices, the shrill babble of sounds delighting them hugely.

Ezekiel felt hopelessly depressed and heavy-hearted. He stared around him for a little while, as if bewildered and

half dazed, and then, sighing heavily, hung his head and slouched homewards like a man with feet of lead.

The sun was westering fast, though still a long way from setting, when Ezekiel turned his back on the narrow streets of Newlyn, with the present for "little Morvenna" tucked safely under his arm. As he trudged along the cliff-path from here to Polurrian—the road dipping and rising and changing its character frequently; now contracted between the banks of a cutting, near Mousehole, and presently almost indistinguishable on the face of the open moor—he found the finches and linnets had crept in among the furze-clumps and cowered there "cheeping" faintly at intervals; the swallows wheeling to and fro in the shadowed hollows, almost as low and as close to him as bats; while higher up the swifts were careering to and fro restlessly, screaming shrilly at intervals as if a storm were coming up.

The wind began to moan drearily across the slopes, and the clouds swept raggedly, though in vast battalions, across the huge wan dome under whose hollow he trudged so heavily—trudged with no other companion than his own sombre thoughts.

The crabber was used to the loneliness of wide, open spaces, of the great treeless hills haunted eerily by the wind, and of the treacherous world of waters—so solitary and so immense. But the sense of isolation that weighed on him this evening appeared to be peculiarly disquieting to his nerves. He seemed to be shaken with the dumb, vague terrors of an outcast who is aware that blind old Fate is at his heels.

He grew hot and cold by turns at the subtle unknitting of his strength, till he felt like one trembling at the crumbling edge of a pit.

Suddenly, from among the fern-clumps, the boulders of granite and the furze-bushes, a figure started up and hailed him hoarsely.

For a second or two, Ezekiel stood like one stricken with catalepsy: his legs seemed to have turned to wood, and his hands were as lumps of lead.

And then the deep bass voice again shouted to him gruffly: "Thee'rt the man I want to see! Gi's thy haand, owld friend!" And a black hand thrust itself suddenly before him: the long, thin fingers sticking out like claws.

"Thought for the minute thee wert the Devil!" Ezekiel managed to articulate; staring at Tom with intent and fascinated curiosity.

"I ben chasin' sauls, anyhow: an' here's wan I've caught," said Tom the Hangman, holding up something.

Ezekiel stared at the "something" fearfully: half imagining it might be an infant.

It was only a dead hare, with its head hanging from Tom's fist; and Ezekiel, now recognising that his old enemy was out poaching, recovered his nerve somewhat, sorely shaken though he was.

"I was thinkin' o' comin' down to see'ee," said Tom the Hangman. "We can talk a bit now, as owld friends shud; an' I'll walk home weth'ee, for the pleasure o' thy company."

Ezekiel eyed him apprehensively, but with a dreary feeling that to be thus haunted was a part of his "judgment." It reminded him of a horrible tale he had once heard in a sermon: the preacher telling of live men who, for a punishment for something, were fastened hand and foot, and face to face, to dead bodies, and had to endure the torture until they died themselves. "Deliver me from this body of death!" one of them had cried in agony; as Ezekiel now remembered while he ached and quivered with nausea. And "Deliver me from this body of death!" Ezekiel entreated now.

"Ay, you," said Tom, limping along beside him, "I feel there must be watchers who keep a' eye on us all'ys, an' see that owld friends do meet when 'tes necessary. Owld Nick," he touched his forehead, as if to a superior, "Owld Nick, as well as the Awther, do keep a' eye on' es awn, so as to manage thaise little matters for us, b'leeve. Don't'ee think so, owld friend?" asked Tom, peering up at him. "I all'ys like to hear thy opinion on a point."

"My opinion es—I wish the Devil wed take *thee*!"

"No doubt, no doubt. Very kind of'ee, I'm sure. But thee see, owld friend, He still got work for me. I'm His pig-driver, ef thee wust; I keep together the drove for'n. When the ovven-doors es oppen, He don't like to miss wan. In they go—black an' white, big pigs an' little wans—owld or young, in they go: an' every wan counts."

Ezekiel shivered from head to foot, and was conscious of his every joint: not a single limb working without a dull, aching pain.

"It must be a change for a dead man to git in by the Devil's chimney-corner," mused Tom, as if unconscious of a listener: and then he added, with a sudden brightening, turning to Ezekiel, "It must take the chill out of his bones for'n—eh? Cowld as ice they do feel, don't they, when thee lift them out o' the say?"

Ezekiel trembled visibly, and his face went as white as a sheet.

"But 'tes the gowld tha's warm all'ys: as warm as when it was minted! A man do forgit how dead flesh do feel, when he do git the gowlden suvrins in his fingers: don't'a, you?"

"My God! ef 'twasn' murder, I'd squeeze the life out o' thy carkiss!" cried Ezekiel—a sudden leap of passion in his heart.

"No doubt; but 'tes murder. An' ef I shud happen to be missin' at any time, we're such owld friends, they'd be sure to pitch on *thee*." He changed his tone, suddenly, to one of mere contempt. "I shud ha' thought *wan* ghost, man, was enough to hunt'ee.¹ What cud'ee do weth two—wan on ayther side? And hunt'ee I shud, surely, 'tell the rope was round thy neck!"

Ezekiel glanced at him, with a strange expression, but made no reply. And a somewhat lengthy silence ensued.

The immense dome of the sky, owing to the heavy clouds massing across it—huge, sprawling blotches of almost funereal

¹ Haunt thee.

blackness—seemed gradually to be narrowing and darkening into a vault. And the moan of the wind was almost lugubrious enough for the moaning of souls in torment: lamentations floating up from an underworld of pain. Even the deep, glowing crack in the clouds in the west, where the molten fire seemed to gush through redly, only heightened the portentous and almost terrifying effect.

The unseen swifts screamed uncannily at intervals; but the homelier swallows were no longer visible: and the finches and linnets, and the other haunters of the moorland, were all, now, silent and huddled out of sight.

The storm that was sweeping up from the open spaces of the Atlantic, appeared to be heavily charged with electricity; and the cloudy forerunners of it already had awed the world and dusked it warningly.

The crabber walked on wearily and shakily, his eyes fixed and staring straight ahead of him, the swelling of his heart and the leaping of his pulse taking the place of articulate thought: while the pedlar limped along just abreast of him, watching Ezekiel closely out of the corners of his eyes.

There was an evil scowl on the pedlar's countenance as he dragged his lame foot heavily across the tussocks, and between his parted lips his teeth showed plainly, not unlike those of a snarling dog. Presently he growled hoarsely, and almost pantingly, "Sim to me, owld friend, thee'rt tired o' me company."

"Thee never spok' a truer word in thy life!"

And just then, from somewhere out of the gloom of the approaching storm, a low rumble, as of distant thunder, became audible.

"There's a storm comin' up," said the pedlar, sniffing the air.

"Lev' it come," said Ezekiel.

And the thunder growled again.

"Iss, tha's a warnin' to me weth my rheumatics. I must git onder shelter 'fore it do break. I'm an owld man..." said Tom, and peered up in the crabber's face.

Ezekiel slackened his pace to listen: waiting he hardly knew for what.

"I'm an owld man, an' this here followin' of'ee es tirin' me. B'leeve I must give it up, you—b'leeve I must give it up."

Ezekiel drew his breath with laboured heaviness: waiting eagerly what the ugly little creature had to say.

"I ben thinkin' it ovver while I ben tailin' along behind'ee, an' I've come to the conclusion that it'll be best for us to part."

A thin streak of lightning jagged across the sky, and the thunder boomed heavily, as if close behind the hills. Ezekiel stared at the hairy little creature beside him, and was fascinated by the odd expression of his face. His teeth showed plainly through his ragged grey moustache, and there was a strange mocking glee in his little beady eyes.

"This saycret o' thine, weth thee so surly to me, do give too much trouble to an owld man like me."

He paused, as if expecting that Ezekiel would say something.

But the crabber, staring hard at him, remained as dumb as a stone.

"Ef thee gi' me twenty pounds, I cud forgit all about it."

Ezekiel held his peace: clutching hard at Morvenna's present, and gnawing his moustache restlessly.

"But . . . ef thee waan't . . . I'm thinkin' o' sellin' it," said Tom.

Ezekiel started visibly. "What!" he cried hoarsely: "Sellin' it? To who?"

"I ben lookin' round—thinkin' a bra' bit about it. It wed be wuth money to a man less friendly to'ee than I am."

Again he paused expectantly.

But again there was no response.

"I ben lookin' round for a long time for somewan to sell it to: somewan who do know'ee . . ."

The lightning flashed out vividly—a long, jagged streak darting across the sky—and then a heavy peal of thunder crashed and rattled among the hills.

But the two men stared at each other through it all. Ezekiel watching Tom the Hangman with close and fascinated curiosity; and the latter studying the crabber with his ferrety little eyes.

"Sellin' it to somewan who do know'ee," Tom repeated.

Ezekiel clenched his fist and set his teeth hard together. His heart stood still: he had to open his lips to breathe.

"Mester Richards, the schoolmaster, I do mayne," said Tom the Hangman.

Ezekiel turned on him with a sudden movement as if he would seize him by the throat.

Up flashed Tom's hand with a hedger's knife in it. "Bein' a lonely owld man, I do carr-ry this—see! Wan do need it sometimes, poachin' a bit at night," he added, with his eyes fixed watchfully on the crabber.

Ezekiel's hand fell limply by his side.

"By the way, come to think of it, 'tes *thy* li'l maid he ben an' marr-ried, esn' it? Why, iss, o' coorse; so 'tes, too! That was a cureyus thought o' mine, so pat now, warn't it? He'll be onder thy thumb, like: a' eddicated son-in-law. Ef he don't git thee onder *his*, that es. Surely" (as if a sudden thought had struck him), "but no! he'd never be mayne enough to do it!" And he glanced at Ezekiel, as if questioning him, with a troubled anxiety in his eyes. "Surely he wedn' be mayne enough to thraw the li'l maid ovver, ayven ef he ded feel ashamed of her faather! Do'ee think he wed?" he asked, with well-simulated concern.

Ezekiel stood fronting him, on the windy cliff-top, with his teeth clenched tightly—even tighter than his fists.

"Well, 'tes *he* I shall offer it to, anyhow," said Tom, "onless thee gi' me anawther twenty pounds. When he got it, thee must make the best bargain thee can weth un. An' [■]e thee caan't make any, an' he do cast off the li'l maid for it—remember! thee ded it all for the sake o' twenty pounds!"

The words were scarcely uttered, before a tremendous peal of thunder crashed and rattled overhead with a clamour almost deafening: the lightning playing across the cliff-top

with a blinding glare that seemed to daze, as well as to dazzle, the bewildered crabber, who was just about to open his lips to consent.

Ezekiel instinctively clapped his hand over his eyes, and at the same time started to run, almost unthinkingly: his nerves completely unstrung by the appalling uproar, coming so sharply on the wrenching torture to which the pedlar had been subjecting him.

Again the lightning blazed with an intolerable fierceness—running down from the clouds in long, jagged streaks—and the thunder boomed and roared with a tumult that was indescribable: volley after volley crashing and rattling among the hills till the thrust and the deafening roar seemed to be everywhere and simultaneous.

It seemed only for an instant that Ezekiel had shielded his face and staggered on blindly: but when he again uncovered his eyes, and stared dazedly around him, he was startled to find that the pedlar had disappeared.

As a matter of fact, Ezekiel had stumbled on, with his eyes covered, a good many yards from the spot where he had been standing when the thunder had bellowed so threateningly close to him. He had continued running automatically, when once he had started, and his confused idea that the pedlar would be still at his elbow was merely due to the general bewilderment of his thoughts.

He was now thoroughly scared, and shook as if with the palsy; an uncanny awe striking blindly through his brain. "Tom the Hangman . . . or the Devil . . . which had it actually been!"

Ezekiel took to his heels in terror—a feeble, grey old man, though he was—and ran and stumbled and recovered himself shakily, and struggled on again, panting loudly and heavily; a prey the while to a panic fear that spilled his strength like water, and left him almost as witless as a child.

But, through it all, he clung instinctively to the present for "little Morvenna," for which he would have fought almost as hungrily as for his life.

When he finally staggered up to the door of his cottage—

his limbs trembling under him, and his face looking ghastly in its drawn, haggard whiteness—Malva, who was there watching for him, gave a cry of consternation.

“Why, faather, wha’s the matter weth’ee!” she cried, shaking from head to foot. “Aw, dear! whatever have happened! Thee look as ef thee got thy death-stroke!”

“Onnly . . . wish . . . had!” Ezekiel managed to articulate.

CHAPTER XLIV

THE TWILIGHT OF THE GODS

“I WEDN’ go up to Choone to-day, faather, ef I was thee: thee arn’t fit for it, I’m sure,” said Malva on the Sunday.

“I’m goin’,” said Ezekiel, in his dull, lifeless way.

Malva watched him uneasily. She had noted during the morning the strange, flickering fire that seemed to glitter in his eyes, and then vanish as swiftly and unaccountably as it arose—to be followed by an air of far-away abstraction, when he would stare here and there fixedly (but, for all that, unseeingly) as if his thoughts were groping blindly in unfamiliar paths—and her heart was full of forebodings as inexplicable as they were vague.

“While I’m away,” said Ezekiel presently, “thee can take up that theer bird to Morvenna. Ef I drop in to see her, it’ll be after I come back.”

“She shall have it,” replied Malva. “An’ bra’ an’ proud she’ll be of it, too, bless her heart!” she added, as if hoping to deflect his thoughts in this way.

Ezekiel made no remark. Presently he went out on the doorstep to brush his hat. But, instead of brushing it, he stood on the step with the hat and brush in his hand, and fell to gazing across the sea with a long and wistful look: all the furrows, and indeed the entire expression of his countenance, conveying the impression of a melancholy that was almost tragic in its depth.

"I'm uncomfortable in me mind about'ee, faather; tha's a fact," said Malva, coming out to the doorstep to him. "I do feel that terrible queer an' onaisy, as ef somethin' whisht was hangin' ovver thy head. Don't'ee go to-day, faather!" she added, watching his face closely: "'tes more than thee can stand; I'm sure thee arn't fit for it."

"I'm goin'," said Ezekiel.

"I thought laast night thee wert goin' to have a fit, thee snored so hard and struggled and groaned so much," said Malva. "Thee wert grindin' thy teeth 'most all the night. I was afraid to go to slaip haaf the time, tha's a fact. In pain was'ee, faather: or was it onnly draims?"

"Draims, onnly draims," said Ezekiel gloomily.

"Still, don't'ee go, faather!" pleaded Malva earnestly.

"I'm goin'," said Ezekiel. "'Tes borne in on me mind there's a message there waitin' for me."

"Wish Morvenna warn't so poorly; then she cud go weth'ee," said Malva uneasily.

"Wish, wish—I'm all'ys wishin'—what do it amount to?" quoth Ezekiel gloomily. "I'm sick an' tired o' wishin': I must end it wan way or t'awther. Or—ef it do end me—well, so be it! What es to be, will be, s'pose," he muttered: "whether 'tes foretold for a man or a mouse."

And in this fatalistic mood he donned his Sunday garments and sat down to dinner, which to-day was unusually early, as the service at Choone was to commence at three o'clock.

In vain Malva set before him the most tempting efforts of her cookery, Ezekiel protested that he had no appetite: he "cudn' ayte to save his life." Just to please her, he tried to eat a mouthful or two, but he seemed almost to choke in doing so, and finally he abandoned the attempt.

It was evident that his excitement, though suppressed in outward manifestations, was overmasteringly strong inwardly and could with difficulty be suppressed.

Malva made him a cup of tea, and this he managed to drink. But the trembling of his hand as he lifted the cup, and the convulsive movement of his lips as he swallowed the

first mouthful—the hysterical symptoms, however, being less marked afterwards—hinted significantly how deep was the agitation that shook him.

In vain Malva referred more than once to Morvenna's present—how pleased “the cheeld” would be with it and how nice it would look in her little parlour—Ezekiel was in a state of such extreme nervous tension that to the commoner moods of life it was impossible for him to unbend.

He stared, and answered automatically—when he could remember to do so—and the queer “catch” in his voice and the odd misplacing of his words, were as noticeable as they had been on the black day of his collapse.

“Gi’ me crab-pot . . . me . . . I . . .” he paused, staring helplessly. “You d’knew what I mayne . . . me . . . that theer thing theer . . . Me hat,” he jerked out irritatedly at last.

Malva watched him furtively, her heart aching full of fears. Finally, when she had brushed him down and arranged his necktie to her satisfaction, she let him go forth in peace and set out on his pilgrimage.

Malva went to the end of the row to watch him out of sight and followed him with her eyes till he was half-way up the valley, and was only a moving blotch (diminishing every moment) amid the long blur of greenery to which the valley dwindled at last.

Ezekiel had not been gone more than half-an-hour when Mrs. Roscorla came to the door, her eyes quick with excitement.

“Heerd the news ’bout Tom the Hangman?” she called in to Malva, and followed up the question by entering the kitchen.

“No, you: what news?” Malva asked anxiously.

“Found dead up close to Carn Dhu,” said Mrs. Roscorla.

“What! found dead?” cried Malva excitedly.

“Iss; killed by the lightnin’ in that theer storm yesterday. Isaac heerd it this mornin’ up at the kiddly-wink.”¹

¹ Beer-shop.

"How do they knaw he was killed by the lightnin'?" asked Malva uneasily.

"He was found weth his clothes split all down the back, lying' 'pon his face up among the ferns, an' both his boots was busted off, split to rags, so they do say, an' there was marks upon his body . . ."

"What sort o' marks?"

"Dunnaw, I'm sure. Sort o' burns, s'pose, you. Anyhow, they marks on his skin an' the awther things, they do prove plain enough he was killed by the lightnin', the folks do say."

"Well, he've gone to his account,"¹ said Malva, after a pause. "He waan't be missed on earth for the good he done, at any rate."

"Tha's true," said Mrs. Roscorla: "he was wan o' the Owld Wan's dogs, ef ever there was wan." And with that she fell to discussing the dead man and his failings and the many uncanny tales drifting around concerning him: Malva listening patiently, and occasionally joining in, but half the time making her attention to her household duties an excuse for remaining silent and thinking quietly to herself.

The walk to Choone taxed Ezekiel's strength to the uttermost. Long before he reached the end of the tramp, his knees began to weaken and "give way" markedly, and he was only able to progress with a jerky, sprawling gait not unlike that of incipient paralysis. He began to feel a vague fluttering dread of himself. His sense of self-control seemed ebbing away strangely; and whole tracts of his personality appeared to be slipping from his grasp, crumbling away into the darkness and leaving him tremblingly bewildered. He felt he wanted to cry out—the desire was so urgent that it frightened him—and, as he shambled along, he began to mutter brokenly to himself: wetting his lips and breathing heavily and with a gasping effort, while a strange dimming mistiness came and went across his eyes.

¹ Here used for "judgment."

When he arrived at the edge of Choone, he saw a young girl filling her jug at the "shoot."¹

On Ezekiel, in his thick and strangely slurred utterance, asking her to give him a drink of water, the girl at first seemed to be inclined to run from him.

But, on glancing at him again, she complied with his request; though her repugnant fear of him was very evident: her manner conveying the impression that she believed he was intoxicated.

Ezekiel almost emptied the jug—drinking with a convulsive fluttering of the lips, and with a deep, sighing thirst, like the panting of a hunted animal. And then, feeling to a certain extent freshened and re-invigorated, he made his way slowly to the heart of the village.

Choone this afternoon was full of moving people. All the cottage doors were open, and ruddy-faced wives in their Sunday clothes, and children in snowy pinafores with their little cheeks shining, were everywhere in evidence up and down the village street. Here and there knots of girls, and groups of growing lads, were congregated against the hedges or at the ends of the cottages, while young men and women (at the edge of, or in, the twenties) walked about in pairs, or in groups of threes and fours. Nearly a score carts and traps were scattered about the village: some with their shafts tilted up in the air, and some with the horses still unharnessed. And everywhere there was an air of movement and bustle: the stir and shuffle of moving feet; the murmurous hum of many voices; the sound of wheels, of horses' hoofs, the clack of geese, the barking of dogs.

Never before—except at feasten-tide—had Choone been so full of restless coming and going, or its atmosphere so saturated with the smell of cooking food. And certainly never before in the whole of its history—unless it were in the far-off days of the Wesleys—had the village echoed so incessantly with the hum of religious phrases and the singing of hymns up and down among its cottages.

Many of the recent converts in Newlyn had come up

¹ A small chute for conveying water from a spring.

to Choone for to-day's special service—following the man whose impressive personality had so magnetised them—and many also of his casual and occasional hearers (some of them “convicted” but not yet “converted,” and others merely “impressed,” or in whom “the work had begun dimly”) had followed him here to renew, if that were possible, the experience that previously had so bewildered and disquieted them. Consequently, long before the preacher arrived on the scene, the atmosphere was surcharged with spiritual electricity, and his congregation (at whatever time it might gather) was prepared to come together with nerves strung to concert-pitch, and with minds sensitised into a mood of unusual receptiveness.

Up and down the village, arm-in-arm, the converts marched in little groups of twos and threes, singing hymns jubilantly expressive of their happiness, and lyrically inviting others to share the happiness if they would.

Again and again they sang among the cottages:—

*“ No darkness have we who in Jesus abide :
The Light of the world is Jesus !
We walk in the light when we follow our Guide :
The Light of the world is Jesus !
Come to the Light, 'tis shining for thee ;
Sweetly the Light has dawned upon me—
Once I was blind, but now I can see !
The Light of the world is Jesus ! ”*

Meanwhile others, not yet assured of their “liberation,” could be heard here and there “tuning” together as they walked:—

*“ Pass me not, O gracious Father !
Sinful though my heart may be !
Thou might'st leave me, but the rather
Let Thy mercy light on me !
Even me !
Even me ! ”*

Already Ezekiel had begun to feel in his veins the fever and the unrest that pervaded the village so noticeably: and

as he wandered up and down and to and fro among the groups, the grey old man, shambling along so painfully, looked (as more than one remarked) "like a man half mazed."

Presently, the cry began to travel to and fro, "Mester Naesmith es in sight! The praicher es comin'!"

And immediately every one began to hurry to the further end of the village, where the tiny granite chapel stood close to the edge of the moor.

The chapel forms had been brought out and arranged on the grass, and many of the cottagers had lent chairs and the forms used in the chimney-corners, so that altogether there were seats for about three hundred people, while as many more as cared to could stand around on the grass.

Obtaining a seat near the waggon in which the minister was to stand (in order that he might be seen and heard of all) Ezekiel sank down heavily on the form; by this time feeling completely exhausted: his heart, the while, slowing to such a point of feebleness that he almost lapsed away into a faint.

Preaching to-day with the glamour of his past success on him, with his converts the while gazing up at him yearningly, and with his own strong will bracing him to the utmost, Mr. Naesmith, for all his physical weakness, had his audience, so to speak, in the hollow of his hand.

The congregation, from the moment it gathered in front of him, was emotionally quick in all its members, and was as hungry to receive the impress of his personality as he was to fashion it into the mood for retaining this.

The first hymn sung at once put the twain in touch: and from that moment the preacher on the one hand, and the congregation on the other, were as the air and the harmony to a piece of music so impressive that scarcely any one could have listened to it without a tremor of the heart.

But Ezekiel all this entirely escaped.

He heard the preacher's voice thrusting forward and receding at intervals, and all around him the rising and falling of the great waves of sound, and he was dimly aware

of the wide dome of blue overhead, with the crows flapping heavily as they winged their way across it, and now and then cawing dissonantly, like his own discordant thoughts. And deep in his heart he had the feeling that this unimpressed dulness, this curse of spiritual deadness that kept him unquickened even now, was the punishment fated for him while he was on earth—fated for him that from hell he might in nowise escape.

He had the idea that Satan had a kind of personal hankering after him; was his direct and private enemy, much as Tom the Hangman was, and would therefore do everything that lay in His power to deaden his spiritual impulses and to retain him for Himself.

Therefore, while the other members of the congregation seemed to rise to emotional ecstasy, or to agonise in spiritual pain, it appeared to Ezekiel only natural that he, and he alone, should remain as cold and unimpressed as if the preacher, thundering at him, were merely an old black crow cawing idly over his head.

The singing had long been over and the sermon was now in full swing, and all the time Ezekiel, sitting here quaking, watched the strange surging passion that possessed certain of the "convicted"—their sobbing cries for mercy, their hysterical agony of emotion—watched it with a sense of deadness that made him tremble at himself.

Presently, however, the incessant stir around him—the frenzied appeals, the emotional ebullience, the intense spiritual agitation—seemed to break through the spell that had kept him hitherto like a clod.

A sudden poignant clearness illuminated his brain: and Ezekiel, though still ignorant of the secret influences acting on him, was caught in the magic net even as the others, and felt his heart shake and flutter at the strange effect produced.

He began, now, to listen keenly to the sobbing cries of those around him—to the passionate prayers and pleadings, the agonised attempts to clutch at faith—and when one here and another there, and a third somewhere in the crowd, began to shout in ecstasy that "he was forgiven!"

that "God had cleansed him!" then Ezekiel's heart, also, leaped in momentary exultation . . . and he was horrified at his sinfulness . . . and he fell a-quaking for himself.

At last, the fountains of the great deep within him were broken up—he was stirred to the depths of his nature—he throbbed and agonised with the rest.

Just at this juncture the preacher was dilating on secret sins: on the barriers that had to be broken through before a man could obtain forgiveness: on the things that kept him from the Mercy-seat and held him fettered to the Devil's chariot—the chariot that was dragging him steadily down the slippery road to Hell.

"Yes," said the preacher, with a solemn impressiveness, "it is the man of the hidden sin who is the hardest to save. The open sinner—the man whose evil deeds are notorious—has less to cast off when he is running for his life: when he turns his back on Satan and makes for the Mercy-seat. The world knows him for what he is, and no one is startled by his confession; heavy though his pack may be, it has always been in sight. He can run, and run frenziedly, to save the soul he has learned to value; and no one lifts an eyebrow, or points the finger at him. They will clear the roadway for him, they will hearten him all the way.

"But the man with the hidden sin—the secret thing that no one knows of—for *him* to run for his life, and in the face of his friends, how difficult! And for *him* to be saved—God help him!—this is the hardest task of all!

"Hardest because of himself, I mean. Not hard to the Infinite Mercy. For the Lord is compassionate *always*;" his voice was tremulous with human tenderness: "'able' and 'willing' *always* to save to the uttermost. To save to the uttermost," he cried, and in his voice there was the ring of a trumpet, "whoever may be the sinner, and whatever may be the sin!"

He paused again, to take breath, and broke into a fit of coughing, after which he resumed more quietly, like one pleading with a friend, "Let no man because his sin is hidden, *as he imagines*, believe that it is hidden entirely—

even from his fellow-men. From God it is not hidden : and this the sinner knows. From the Devil it is not hidden : and this he recognises dimly. But even here, among his fellows, there may be those who know of his transgression : some one who, all unknown, even saw the sin committed. Some one, perhaps, who has not hitherto laid an arresting hand on the sinner's shoulder : but who is waiting . . . waiting to do so . . . and may do it *even to-day !*”

Ezekiel was trembling violently, and was white with excitement : the great beads of perspiration standing thickly on his brow. He was breathing loudly and heavily, with his mouth half open ; his eyes were staring wildly ; and his face was painfully drawn. And his gaze was riveted on the preacher with such concentrated intensity that he was entirely oblivious of every one else.

“I, myself,” continued the preacher, “was once the witness of a secret sin, whose actor, up to the present, has remained hidden from his fellow-men. But there were two who saw his crime, and set it down in the book of memory, and at the judgment-seat of God, if that man be still impenitent, we shall witness against him to his condemnation . . . that other and myself.

“He was a crabber, from one of the coves in this neighbourhood, and he was fishing yonder out in the bay one spring evening about sunset ; and I was wandering on the cliff simply feasting on the scene and studying, through a telescope, the occasional vessels that came in sight. Presently, for lack of something better to stare at, I chanced to level my glass at the crabber in his boat : and lo ! there was the man at the sin that would damn him !”

“To be saved es impossible for me !” thought Ezekiel, in his agony : “Tom the Hangman was the Devil—this es God condemning me now !”

“Being far out from land, and no craft within sight of him, the man no doubt thought that he was secure from observation : and when he sent the body adrift, after he had robbed it, he doubtless imagined that his sin was known only to himself.

"But *God* knew of it; ay, and the Devil watched it gleefully—here is one soul more for my net, he would think—and the man who stood beside me, he was aware of it even as I was.

"Yet the crabber, the secret sinner, hugged the thought that he was unseen!

"In this faith he has lived—a secret sinner—up to the present: and in this faith (if impenitent) he will die and go to the judgment.

"He will die," he paused impressively, lingering weightily on every word," and he will pass into the torments that have been prepared for the unrepentant—where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched!

"I have often thought of that man—that secret, hidden sinner—often thought of him, and prayed for him, and wondered often who he might be.

"It is possible that I have met him, I may have spoken to him in the streets; I may even have held his hand in the fellowship of the meeting-house. It is possible, for aught I know, that he may be here before me now!"

There was a loud, hoarse cry, almost like a scream of agony, and up sprang Ezekiel lifting his hand to Heaven wildly and trying to articulate something, no one could make out what.

The people stared at him bewildered, many thinking he must be crazy: there was a sudden movement of white faces: a sudden craning of necks.

"Iss . . ." cried Ezekiel, his eyes blazing with excitement, his tongue tripping and stumbling, a strange contortion attacking his features. "Iss . . ." and then he gave an odd, gasping gurgle. He swayed to and fro drunkenly, vainly endeavouring to articulate . . . and then he fell back helplessly (his head hanging on his shoulders) into the arms that were thrust out hastily to hold him up and break his fall.

CHAPTER XLV

THE HILLS OF REST

MALVA was braver than either of her daughters had dared to hope that she would be. She felt that she was nearer the end of life than they were, for *her* the Hills of Rest were now almost within sight, and she faced death, and the inevitable parting, with less of the anguish of rebellion—with a surer and clearer knowledge of the calm she was nearing steadily—than those whose lives stretched out before them in a succession of years that seemed endless. They might have a lifetime to regret and remember in—if they could remember and regret so long—at most, *her* time of trial would be only for a few years: and might not even be so much, if the burden were beyond her strength. In this brevity she saw her comfort: after all, “it was not for long!”

Ezekiel never recovered consciousness: not even for a moment. He simply lay among the clean sheets motionless and pallid, his life ebbing away from him at every breath that he drew.

The scantily furnished room, with its signs everywhere of a starved existence—of a life rude, and simple, and hard exceedingly—had already faded from his eyes, of which the lids would never lift again: and in the sombre quiet and solitude, born of old age and poverty, he lay now helplessly waiting for the end.

“Poor owld Ezekiel es dyin’,” said the neighbours in the row, as they glanced up at the window breaking through the thatch, a softening mist of memories falling on their hearts.

“Iss, poor owld saul, dyin’ as we all must.”

“Well, he’ve lived honestly an’ respectably, an’ done no harm to nowan. He’ve arned his rest, poor saul, ef ever a man ded.”

"Iss, that he have. God be good to un at the laast!"

And old Isaac Roscorla, who was standing among the others, said softly, "*Amen!*" as if it had been a prayer.

With many a heartache and many a disquieting flutter of the pulse, Ezekiel Trevaskis, as long as he could remember, had been pursuing Happiness and her Sister down the dusty road of life. But neither had ever thrilled him with the enchantment of her kiss. Nor had he ever been able to get near enough even to touch their garments. Always they had shone ahead of him—as he toiled on weighted with his pack of anxieties—as distant and as unattainable as heaven and its stars. Now, however, as he lay here helplessly dying, into the room had come the Sisters and, with infinite tenderness, had pressed upon his brow their consoling kiss of peace. And from henceforth the crabber's sufferings were as a shadow that has passed away. For a little while, life might still struggle in him mechanically, but no more would he know pain, nor any unhappiness: there had been bestowed upon him, once for all, the sacrament of the final peace.

Malva had decided that while a breath of life remained in his body, she would not leave "her man" alone, even for a minute.

For the first half of the night Drusilla watched with her mother, but about midnight Malva urged her, and indeed compelled her, to go to bed.

Morvenna had begged hard to be allowed to sit up with them, but to this Malva could by no means be brought to consent. "I'll call'ee later on, me dear, when I do see a change," she remarked, smoothing the girl's hair with indescribable tenderness. "Thee shall set weth me later on, when Drusilla do go to bed."

But when Drusilla, on retiring, asked if she should send in Morvenna—the sisters to-night were to sleep together in the old room of their girlhood—her mother said "No!" and held to her decision. "Lev' the poor cheeld have her slaip out," said she gently. "Sorrow'll come soon enough to her—she waan't escape her share of it. She got all

her life to go through, poor cheeld, as it es. Keep the bitter taste out of her mouth so long as the Lord'll lev' us. Lev' her slaip—lev' her slaip!" and she would not be gainsaid.

Alone with her man at last, and secure from observation, Malva tremulously bent over him and whispered into the deaf ears that his old, cruel enemy, Tom the Hangman, was dead!

It was a piece of news that for hours she had been hungering, with intense eagerness, to drop into the well of his thoughts, if it were possible. And she whispered it to him now, and repeated it over again to him, with a loving earnestness as pathetic as it was doomed to be unavailing.

Although there was no response from the drawn white face, with its lids closed heavily and its slowly paling lips, the mere thought that she had told him—as she persisted in believing she had done—seemed to ease and quiet Malva like the lifting of a burden. Eased and quieted her as, she hoped, it had eased and quieted him.

She had a couple of tallow candles alight on the chest-of-drawers, and the Bible and the Wesleyan hymn-book she had placed close to Ezekiel's pillow, where she could touch them with her hand (reverently and half affectionately) whenever she felt the need for this simple bit of comfort. She was unable to read a word, never having been taught her letters, but the "good books" were near him, and their presence was like a prayer.

Once she kissed the Bible, and then laid it to Ezekiel's lips: and once or twice she let his cold hand lie on it heavily.

The poor old mother, in her ignorance and her inarticulate love, seemed to feel comforted by the mere thought that her dying husband should thus come into contact, if only for a moment, with the "good books" both of them had held in such reverence: as though virtue *must* go out of them into the sorely stricken body that was now struggling so feebly to hold the slipping sands of life.

About an hour before the dawn, something white entered the bedroom, and Malva gave a low cry of terror: half believing for the moment that it was one of her dead children, come (surely out of love!) to fetch his poor father—come to pilot him home through the unknown paths.

"Hush, mother!" whispered Morvenna, who had stolen in in her white night-dress. "Hush! I can't sleep—I can't, mother, *really*! Will you let me sit with you, if I dress? *Do*, mother!" she pleaded tenderly.

"Well . . . me dear . . . thee may; ef thee caan't slaipe raily."

So Morvenna stole back softly to her sleeping sister's bedroom: and soon glided back again, now fully dressed.

For the next hour the two women sat beside the dying man, each holding a hand caressingly in hers, and watching him lovingly as the breath ebbed slowly out of his body.

Shortly before sunrise, Malva, her face contorted with the terrible strain of her anguish, came heavily into the bedroom where Drusilla was sound asleep.

"Quick!" cried Malva, tugging at the bedclothes to waken her.

Drusilla rose bolt upright in an instant, her long hair streaming over her shoulders.

"Come quick!" Malva called to her, in a low, trembling whisper. "The change have come! *Quick!* Thy poor faather es passin'!—He's passin', poor dear!" she wailed, and hurried from the room.

Drusilla was out of the bed in an instant, almost before Malva had cleared the door; and ran at once—barefooted, and in her white, fluttering night-dress—into the chamber where Ezekiel, still mercifully unconscious, was now passing into the shadow, with Morvenna hanging above his lips.

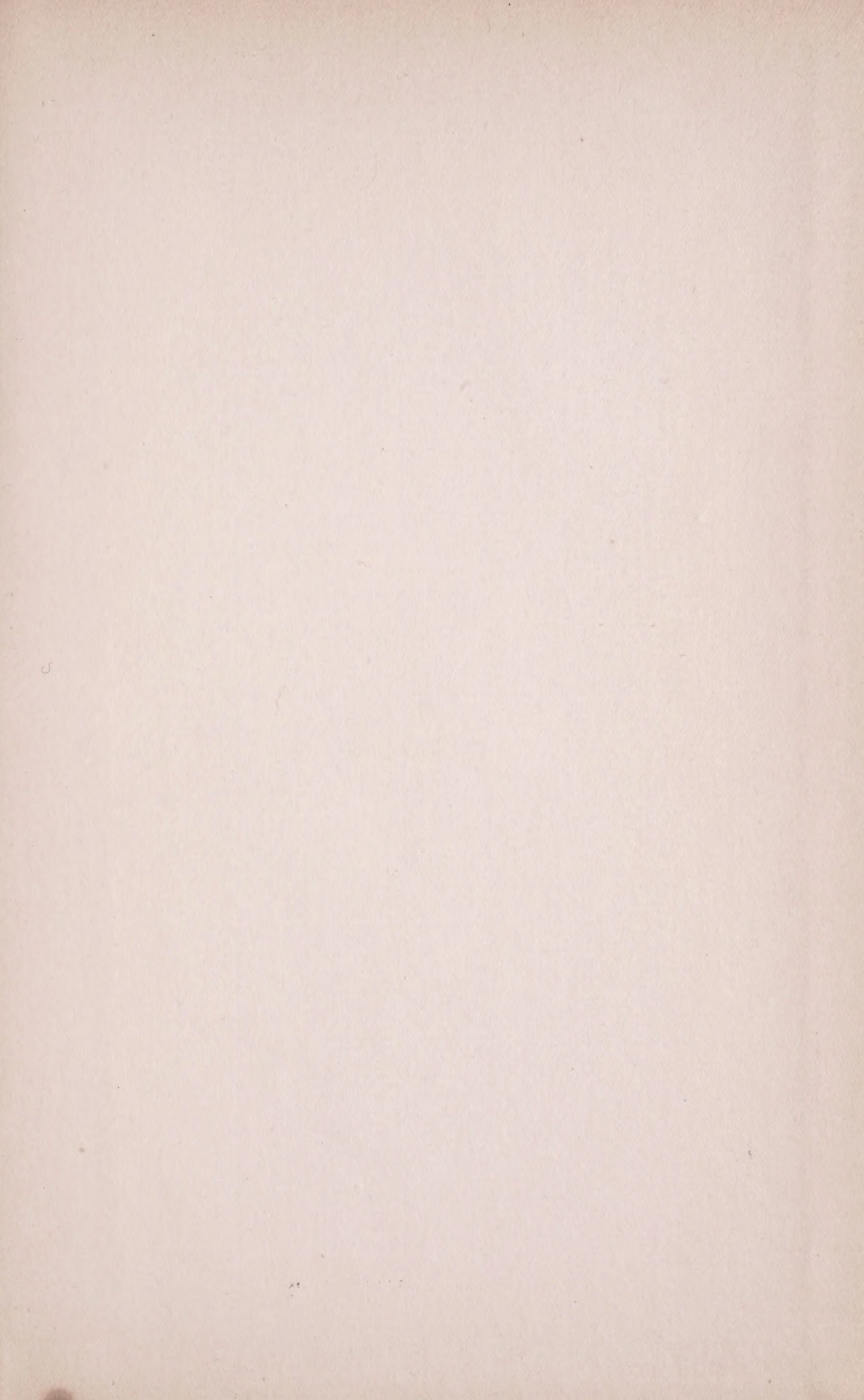
But as Drusilla reached the bed and bent over the whitening face, the final breath ebbed away, and Ezekiel's jaw dropped helplessly.

A heavy sea-fog enveloped the cove: out of the windows

nothing could be seen except the dense white mist : while the moan of the departing tide was audible mournfully in all the cottages, as if a distant, muffled dirge were being intoned solemnly along the coast.

The white sea-mist and the moaning of the tide, it was to these accompaniments that the soul of Ezekiel passed forth now on its lonely wayfaring : to what bourne, or sorrowful homelessness, who shall take on himself to say ?

THE END



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



00021602334